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MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

APRIL, 1970
VOL. 26, NO. 5

NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

THE NAME OF THE GAME IS MURDER

by BRETT HALLIDAY

The Mafia had given its verdict, and dead men would lie in the streets of Miami this night, as Mike Shayne, alone and under a gangland sentence of death, sought the key to Murder—before he would be its next prey. . . . . . 2 to 49

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LEO MARGULIES
Publisher

CYLVIA KLEINMAN
Editorial Director

HOLMES TAYLOR
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THE NEW, COMPLETE MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

Terror walked the Miami streets that night, and Murder walked beside it, as Mike Shayne, alone and marked for death, sought to find and destroy an incredible Mafia blood pact — before it was too late to save himself.

by Brett Halliday

THE BIG fashionable downtown Miami restaurant was a blaze of lights and a confusion of warm spicy odors, clatter of dishes and utensils and the rapid Spanish voices of the Cuban diners.

The dead man fell forward into his plate of food so casually that most of those closest to him noticed nothing out of the ordinary until blood mixed with the food and ran off the plate on to the white linen tablecloth.

The second shot went high of the mark and snatched the freshly lit cigar out of Police Chief Will Gentry's mouth. Neither the Chief nor his dinner companion, private detective Michael Shayne, had heard either shot. At first they didn't realize what had happened to the cigar.

When they did, both men were instinctively on their feet. Chief Gentry saw the murdered man first. Shayne's eyes went past him to the open doors of the kitchen. A slender, dark-haired man with a vaguely military air stood there with his hand inside his jacket as if he were returning a gun to a shoulder holster.

Shayne didn't actually see the gun. What he did see was that the top half of the man's right ear was missing as if cut off by the stroke of a knife at some earlier date.

© 1970, by Brett Halliday

THE NAME OF THE GAME IS MURDER

Then the fellow whipped back through the door and was lost to sight.

Shayne was after him instantly, but by the time he got to the kitchen only a busy gaggle of cooks and bus boys and waiters were in sight. None of them were willing to admit hearing two shots fired—let alone seeing the notch-eared young man. When they discovered that Shayne spoke almost no Spanish, they promptly forgot their own English.

Back in the dining room Chief Gentry had phoned his department from the cashier's desk, and the wailing, whooping sirens of approaching prowl cars could already be heard.

"I never saw such a thing," the Chief said. "Right under my own nose, Mike. This one I've got to solve if it's the last thing I ever do. If I don't Chief Painter and Sheriff Burdick will laugh me out of the State."

"I saw a fellow I think was the killer," Shayne said. "At least he lit out of here like he was. About five-foot-seven, black hair and eyes, sallow complexion, one hundred and twenty pounds and maybe thirty years old. Wearing white shirt and jacket, no tie, blue no-iron slacks and blue canvas deck shoes."

"Nice work. Mike," Gentry said, "I wish all my boys could remember details like you can."

"I do it in self defense," Shayne said. "At least this is one local crime where you nor anybody else can make me a prime suspect. Anyway I'm glad he waited till dessert. It would've been a shame to spoil a meal that good."

"His got spoiled."

Will Gentry was stooped over to examine the corpse. Behind them a solid wall of chattering, yelling patrons crowded close. The manager had locked the front and kitchen doors at Gentry's order.

"Right through the back of the head and out at the base of the nose," Gentry said. "Shot by a man standing some ways behind him. Never knew what hit him. Do you know him, Mike?"

Shayne looked carefully. Like his killer, the man was a Cuban. This one was smaller and older though, and judging by his expensive silk shirt and Palm Beach suit a good deal more affluent. His face was distorted by shock, blood and the exit bullet wound, but Shayne was sure he hadn't seen it before. He shook his head.

Then the prowl car men were at the door. Close behind them the coroner's assistant and the plainclothes men from Homicide. The long and tiring job of identifying and questioning patrons and employees of the restaurant got under way.

Mike Shayne didn't stay to watch a process he was pretty sure would be fruitless in any case. He shook hands with the Chief, thanked him for the dinner, and walked the few blocks back to his Flagler Street

corner third-floor office. His secretary, Lucy Hamilton, was gone for the night, but she'd left a desk lamp lit. Shayne had an occupational dislike of walking into a dark room where someone might be waiting. The light was left to burn all night.

Inside the office he sat down in the oversized, leather-seated swivel chair back of the desk. It just comfortably fitted his big frame. Shayne let himself relax. Despite his lack of personal involvement with the shooting he had a speculative, professional interest.

From the appearance of both victim and killer as he'd seen them, and considering the obvious lack of robbery as a motive, Shayne was inclined to believe that this was a political killing. He didn't envy the job Gentry's men would have unraveling the complex threads connecting the fifty or more loyalist and revolutionary exile groups represented in the Miami area.

The phone on his desk rang suddenly and he picked it up.

"Mr. Shayne?" a cultivated, Latin-accented male voice inquired.

"That's right."

"Mr. Michael Shayne, the private detective?"

"In person," Shayne said. "How can I help you?"

"A half hour ago," the voice said quietly, "you were witness to a shooting in a Miami restaurant. I know of your friendship with Chief Gentry, of course. I want to give you some information concerning that shooting which you can pass on to the proper authorities. My only condition is that you communicate with no one until after you hear me out."

"Are you the killer?" Shayne asked, though he really didn't think so. "How do I know you aren't just trying to eliminate a witness?"

"Actually you don't," the man said, his tone more amused than anything else. "You can have only my word as a gentleman, and I realize that can mean little as long as you don't know my name. However it's the best I can do. Also I'm trusting you not to call your friends at Headquarters. Remember that."

"I like your voice," Shayne said. "How do I find you?"

"I find you, Mr. Shayne. In a few minutes a cab driver will knock on your office door. Go with him and he'll bring you to me. After I talk to you I won't mind your knowing my address. Just don't have yourself followed by the police this first time."

"Okay," Shayne said. "I promise that much."

The cab picked him up right on schedule. It proved to be only a short ride to one of the palatial shore homes that still held their own on Brickel Avenue against the encroaching apartment and office high-rises.

An attendant swung open an ornate iron gate across the driveway to let them into a winding drive be-

tween mahogany and flowering trees. The house itself was designed in Spanish-Moorish style, with its beautifully carved door frame in blue and yellow tiles.

A quiet and courteous man admitted Shayne, and deftly searched him for weapons. The detective surrendered his belt-holstered .38 without protest. He stood in a cool, tile-floored hallway from which arches opened into the ground floor rooms. The one to which he was taken proved to be a library looking out towards the bay. Shelves of leather bound volumes and dark oil paintings of oldtime grandee types decorated the walls. The furniture was massive and heavily carved. Unlike more modern homes, this one wasn't air conditioned, but the open windows let in a cool breeze off the Bay.

The man in the easy chair by the window had white hair and skin like old parchment. His shirt and white suit were fine linen and he wore diamond cuff-links and a heavy yellow gold seal ring on the third finger of his right hand. This man had been power and authority in his day.

He inclined his head to Mike Shayne. "Forgive me if I do not rise. The years take toll. It is good of you to have come. I am Don Jorge Garcia."

Shayne recognized the name and face. This was a famous jurist, statesman and former senator of the pre-Castro Cuba—a man known and respected on three continents.

"You wonder," Don Jorge said, "how I am connected with the killing of that little scorpion of a man tonight. I don't blame you. I did not order his death. To my mind such killings detract from the dignity of an honorable effort to liberate our beloved republic from the communist tyranny. That's why I sent for you, to say the killing was not of our doing."

"You could have told the world that by a news release," Shayne said softly. The big detective had taken off his panama hat and stood respectfully before his host.

Don Jorge waved him to a seat.

"Of course I could," he said. "That is only one reason I wanted to see you. I am afraid there will be more such killings, perhaps many more. If they come as I fear they will, our legitimate efforts will be hurt. I have heard of you as an able and intelligent man, a man of personal integrity who can be hired to do a delicate job and intrusted with full confidence and responsibility."

"You are too kind," Shayne said. "Chief Gentry is also a man of discretion."

"If what I wished were just to have this killer punished, I would not hesitate to call him in myself. But no. It is a much greater affair than that. The apprehension of this one assassin is not important. I bear him no personal ill will. I want to employ you instead to remove the

cause of the killing, so that we may be free to go about our own affairs in dignity and with the respect of your President and Congress."

"That sounds like a big order," Shayne said. "I'm not a James Bond, you know. In international politics I may be out of my depth."

"You are too modest, Mr. Shayne. You will find I think that this is a purely local matter, similar to many you have handled in the past. If you will allow, I will send you to my secretary to be briefed. She knows as much or more of the matter than I do. When you have heard the story, you may refuse if you like. Otherwise a five thousand dollar retainer and advance against expenses and compensation will be given you. Should you refuse, I still beg you to accept a thousand dollars for your time tonight. The only condition is that you respect our confidence."

The cold-eyed manservant returned and led Mike Shayne up a wide, curving staircase to the second floor. A modern office complete with dictaphone and steel filing cabinets had been installed in the room immediately above the library. The servant knocked.

"Come in, Mr. Shayne," said a precise feminine voice behind them in the hall. The woman had come out of one of the other rooms and now led Shayne into the office. The manservant remained in the hall where he could watch, but not overhear, the conversation.

Unlike the old man, this young

woman spoke cultivated and entirely unaccented English. She wore a beautifully tailored linen dress and if she showed any trace of Spanish blood it was in the delicately olive tint of the skin at face and throat. Her face was long and oval and her figure slender and shapely. She had lovely grey-blue eyes and light brown hair falling softly to shoulder length.

She saw Shayne appraising her and said "I know I don't look it, but Don Jorge is my grandfather. My mother is American—one of the Cadwallons of Philadelphia—and my father lived there most of his life while I was growing up. Make no mistake, though, my heart is very Cuban, and I'm proud to aid my grandfather in his work."

Shayne bowed and took the proffered chair.

"I'll get right to business," she said. "We feel that the shooting tonight both was and was not political. The corpse will carry false identity papers, but the man's name was

Alcide Blanco. He was an agent of Castro's private police. Your CIA may have a file on him. I think they will.

"He's been an assassin himself, but that's not why he was killed. In fact I doubt if those who ordered his death know who he really was. You know what Bolita is, of course."

Shayne nodded without speaking.

"There are seven major 'Havana' Houses here in South Florida. They all pay off on the last three digits of the weekly total of Cuban bank clearings. The figure is released each Friday afternoon in Havana and over the radio. Local winners are paid off that evening.

"For three months now—mark, I say months—there've been too many winners of large sums. They've not been legitimate winners. In fact we think they're Castro men, and that Blanco was one of them. The communists need American dollars, as many as they can lay hands on. What better way to get them than to release bank clearing figures according to a pre-arranged system? They can control things so whatever figure they want is released. Their agents over here are betting on a sure thing. They can't lose.

"We want to see the communists cut off from this source of money. We don't want it done by gang war on the part of the Bolita bankers. So we want to hire you to find out what's really going on and to suggest a way of stopping it. Will you help us, Mr. Shayne?"

Mike Shayne tugged at his earlobe with a thoughtful gesture. "You're giving me a big job, Miss Garcia. How much can you people help?"

"We can give you information, watch people, run errands and supply money. We won't give you fighting men. For political reasons we have to stay clear of a shooting war ourselves." She crossed herself. "We will give you our prayers."

"I'll need them," Shayne said. "I don't even speak your language."

"No," she said, "but there are things more important to us than that. We've examined your record for weeks, Mr. Shayne. Tonight's killing was only the catalyst to precipitate our call to you. We feel you're intelligent, and that you're an able professional man. Above all else we feel you can be trusted."

"I've never yet sold out a client, if that's what you mean. I'm not about to start now."

"Good," she said. "Very good. In this envelope is the money grandfather spoke of. Go home and sleep on this. Some day a nation will give you its thanks."

II

THE SAME cab driver who'd brought Mike Shayne to the mansion drove him back to his apartment hotel. He didn't bother to ask the address but just drove by the shortest route.

Pete at the desk handed the red-

head a couple of envelopes marked with his name, but the detective was really too tired to care. Once in his own apartment he tossed them, unopened, on the living room table to wait for the morning. What Shayne wanted was a long, hot shower, a glass of brandy, and the cool sheets of his bed. He took them in that order.

He dozed off almost at once without worrying or speculating about what promised to be a busy tomorrow.

The insistent ringing of his phone woke him about seven in the morning. It was late August and a hot and crimson sun was climbing out of the Atlantic behind the ivory towers of Miami Beach. Shayne was only half awake as he picked the phone out of its cradle on his bedside table.

It was his private line. The office extension and the house phone were both in the living room.

"Shayne here," he said.

"For the love of God, Mike," the instrument replied, "why haven't you called me? Didn't you read the note I left with Pete?" It was the voice of his old friend, Miami *News* reporter Tim Rourke, and it carried an annoyed and urgent overtone.

"Of course I didn't call you, Tim," Shayne said. "I didn't look close enough to see the note was from you. So I didn't open it."

"To change the subject," Rourke said, "they tell me you were having dinner with Will Gentry last night when somebody shot the nose off his face?"

"Not his nose, Tim; only a cigar. And it was just a stray bullet. Not intentional. Otherwise I was. Have they identified the corpse yet?"

"Identified?" Rourke yelled "Where have you been? Of course they haven't identified it. They lost it!"

"Lost it!" Shayne sat straight up in bed and wished he'd put the coffee on. "How in the name of heaven does the police department lose a perfectly good body?"

"It ain't easy. Actually this was stolen. That's right, stolen out of the morgue. Two men in white coats drove up in an ambulance they'd apparently 'borrowed' from Jackson Hospital and said the coroner wanted it moved to the operating room there for a special, extended autopsy, on suspicion of plague."

"Somebody let them take it," Shayne said, "without a signed order?"

"They had a nice forged order on coroner's stationary," Rourke said. "Besides, nobody was on duty that time of night but old Samuels. When he heard the word plague he couldn't get the stiff out of there fast enough. Probably a good thing for him at that. He says the two of them were tough looking customers."

"But didn't they have pictures or prints?"

"Sure," Tim Rourke said. "They took those at the scene of the shooting. They also have a wallet with

identification for Juan Larosa, which is Cuban for John Doe. All forged, or at least they think so. Will sent the prints up to Washington, but the F.B.I. files don't have them."

Shayne said, "Tell him to try the C.I.A. He can ask them to try the name Alcide Blanco for size. But don't bring my name into it."

"Mike," Rourke said, "where did you get that name? How much are you mixed into this? What's going on? What—"

"You ask too many questions before breakfast," Mike Shayne said. "Just tell Will what I said and chalk it up to a lucky guess. If you still have questions, I'll be in my office in about an hour." He hung up.

Shayne went into the kitchenette of his department, started a pot of strong coffee and some bacon and eggs. Then he called the unlisted phone number Isabel Garcia had given him the night before.

"We know," she said when he told her about the stolen body. "It won't be found. By now it's been weighted and sunk in the Gulf Stream. You know his name anyway. What we can't seem to find out is the name of the man you described as the killer. Are you sure he'd lost half an ear?"

"I'm sure," Shayne said. "The right ear."

"We'll keep after it," she said in her musical voice. "You do the same. We'll help where we can."

"I know," Shayne said, "but if you've got a tail on me pull him off. I want to know anybody shadowing me is from the other side. And your people talk too much anyway. You can bet that anything known by one other person besides you and me will be reported promptly."

"That's not fair, Mr. Shayne. We have absolute confidence in our people. You mustn't—"

"Hold it," Shayne said. "Your opposite number trusts his people too, but you hear about every move he makes. You trust your folk all you like. Just don't ever mention me by name."

"If you insist," she said rather frostily and hung up.

After breakfast Shayne walked over to his office. Despite the early hour the air was steamy with humidity, and the heat wave rising from the Flagler Street sidewalk was like the breath of an oven. Merchants were unlocking their doors but keeping them closed while the air-conditioning units went to work.

Shayne didn't like air-conditioning. His third floor office had big windows and high ceilings. The two floors above insulated his to some extent.

Lucy Hamilton, his secretary, was already at her desk.

"Angel," he said, "I've got a case. It won't be an easy one either."

"In that event, Michael," she said, "I hope it'll be a profitable one. I've just been trying to bal-

ance your checking account, and I think you're overdrawn."

Shayne laughed at her. "You worry too much, Angel." He took the envelope Isabel had given him the night before out of his breast pocket and dropped it on the desk in front of her. "You'd better go out and deposit this before you try to balance anything."

Her eyes lit up when she saw the crisp bills inside.

"Yes, master," she said. "By the way, Will Gentry wants you to call him."

"Okay, okay," he said. "I'll call him. Don't you go out till I get back now." He paused in the doorway. "Tim's on his way here from the *News*. When he gets here you go down to the bank with that cash. He can mind the store while you're gone."

He went out then, and down the stairs. His destination was Benny's Fine Foods — whose boast was, —*We Never Close*—on the famous one-two-corner of northeast First Ave. and Second Street. Benny's steaks were excellent, his pies baked on the premises, and his coffee strong enough to stand a spoon in. One time or another he fed everybody from the Mayor and millionaire convention delegates to the pimps and hustlers, queers and pickpockets that live downtown in any city. His place was central headquarters and reference library for the all-pervasive local grapevine.

Mike Shayne bought coffee at the long marble-topped counter and passed the time of day with young Bill, the short-order counterman.

"Bill," he said under his breath, "I want a make on a party with half his right ear gone. I think he's new in town. Probably a Cuban."

Bill dished out an order of buckwheat cakes and then came over to wipe the counter in front of Shayne. "Sure you won't have a Danish?" he asked the detective. "You're half right, Mr. Shayne. The man you want has been here less than a week. Has a room down the street, but he's used to better. Hard as a diamond. Calls himself Jose Ramos, but I don't think it's his right name. I don't think he's Cuban either, though he wants people to think so."

"Have the cops been in about him yet?"

"Not yet, Mr. Shayne, but I expect Cap Ryan for breakfast any time now. He usually does the asking for them."

"When he does," Shayne said, "you never heard of the guy. Here's for the coffee." He put a tightly folded five spot in Bill's hand.

"Never heard of him," Bill repeated. "You don't have to do that though."

Mike Shayne walked three blocks north to the hotel Bill had mentioned. The lobby was a dark and musty enclave that reminded him always of a smuggler's cave. He waited for his vision to clear before going over to the desk.

"Jose Ramos," he said to the hungover, stubble-cheeked clerk. "Is he in?"

The man reached behind him and felt into the mail slot 7-C. Feeling no key, he pulled his hand out again.

"Nah," he said. "Gone out. Ya want me to tell him who called?"

"Don't bother," Shayne said. He sat down in one of the battered wicker chairs provided for the lobby by a parsimonious management.

When the clerk began an uneasy, alcoholic doze once more, Shayne got up and went up the stairs to the third floor and found room 7-C at the rear of the hall. When he knocked as a matter of form he was surprised to hear someone moving around inside. He pounded the door again, louder this time.

There was an indistinct mumble of sound from inside and he heard the door bolt being shot back out of its slot.

Shayne twisted the knob and slammed the door open with his shoulder. The person on the other side was knocked across the room to end up sitting on the unmade bed. Shayne came in with his fist cocked for action, but relaxed when he saw who it was.

"Hello Lolita," he said. "Donde es Ramos?"

"Your accent stinks, Mike Shayne," she said. "I can speak English — and whatsa damn idea shoving me around?"

She was a prostitute well known in the downtown area of Miami, but only about sixteen years old. There was still baby fat on her hips and thighs, though there was nothing at all that was childlike in the bold, obsidian eyes.

"I done nothing," she said. "Don' you wave you fist at me. What you want?"

"I want your customer, Jose Ramos," Shayne said.

"He ain't here," she said. "Look under the bed if you want. If he was, he'd cut you up by now."

"I'm surprised at you, Lolita," Shayne said. "Selling to a Castro agent." Lolita's parents had been killed by the communists before an aunt brought her to Florida.

The girl started to get up, then thought better of it.

"He never is," she spat at Shayne. "Not Castro. Not even Cubano. You know me better, Mr. Mike. All I have for Castro man is a knife."

"All right then, what is he?"

She was on guard again. "How do I know? Only that he isn't Cuban."

"I believe you," Shayne said. "I do know you better than that so I'll just wait and ask him myself." He sat down in the one cane-bottomed chair the room supplied.

The girl watched him with hooded eyes. Then she lay back on the rumpled sheet so that her breasts stood up under the thin, yellow blouse she wore. A black skirt came barely to her knees and she pulled it a couple of inches higher. "You wanta have a party while you wait?"

"No thanks, Lolita," Shayne said. "You'd make me clean forget what I was here for."

"To forget like that is good," the girl said. "I like you. How about it, dear?"

"Not today," Shayne said. "Don't tempt me more."

He opened the small closet that went with the room. There was an expensive suit on hangers. The label inside was that of a well known New Orleans tailor. There was only trivia in the pockets. The dresser drawers contained only shirts, underwear, a couple of pair of socks and three packs of a popular brand of cigarettes. He found a locked pigskin suitcase against the wall. It felt empty and nothing rattled inside when he shook. Just to be on the safe side he looked under the bed and turned back the badly worn throw rug. There wasn't even a picture on the wall.

"Satisfied?" the girl asked from the bed. "This guy too smart to leave something around for cops."

"If he's so smart," Shayne asked, "where was he at eight-thirty last night?"

She smiled at him lazily and patted the bed beside her. "Right here, dear, beside Lolita where you should ought to be now yourself. He bring me here around seven and don't even go out till a little while back. There is real man. I know."

"I guess you do," Shayne said. "What did he tell you about himself?"

"You think you're too good for Lolita," she said bitterly. "I tell you nothing. Nothing at all."

Shayne took a twenty dollar bill out of his wallet and showed it to her. She just leaned over the side of the bed and spat on the floor.

"Stupid," she said. "I can make plenty of money."

It was exactly at that moment that the door behind Shayne opened and the man stepped in. The detective was caught completely off guard with his hand extended and holding the bill. The other man had a Luger with a silencer screwed on the barrel and he held it in a rock-steady hand.

He looked at Shayne. "Who are you? Police?" He'd forgotten to use a Cuban accent.

Lolita sat up on the bed and pulled her skirt down.

"Not *policia,*" she said. "This one private shamus. Name is Mike Shayne."

The dark man with the cut ear didn't relax. "Then what are you doing here?"

"I just want to talk," Shayne said. "Can I put my arm down now? I was trying to buy information, not the lady. She wouldn't sell."

"I sell him nothing, dear. Believe me."

"Give her the money anyhow," the man said. "You can relax, but keep your hands in sight. I've heard of you. What do you want?"

"You put on too good an act as a Cuban," Mike Shayne said, "Too good for your own good. I was sent by people who think you're with one of the armies-in-exile. Either that or working for Castro."

The man put back his head and laughed with genuine amusement. He was still alert, but his face was more pleasant now.

"Sit easy, Mike Shayne," he said. "I don't give a damn who wins that war. I mean it."

"Can you prove it?"

Ramos considered this. "Yes, to you I can. You've been in New Orleans. You know who Big Frenchy LaBorde is?"

"I know," Shayne said. "And he knows me."

"Good. Good. Then you call Frenchy. Go ahead, use the phone right here if you want. He'll tell you I'm one of his boys. You know Frenchy ain't mixing up with no crazy barbudo, nor no revolution. He got enough business of his own to keep him busy."

"I can buy that," Shayne said. He could. Big Frenchy was a hoodlum and a smuggler in the tradition of Jean Lafitte. He wouldn't be above a touch of piracy, but his interests were all local. He was no revolutionary or communist either.

Ramos was thinking ahead of him. "So why was that spik plugged last night? That's what you're thinking, isn't it? Now mind you I don't for a minute admit I did it. Lolita will tell you I couldn't have. But whoever did it had nothing to do with revolutions. It was a contract killing, for hire. Somebody gave Frenchy the contract and he passed it on. He didn't care who it was; just so long as he's paid in advance. You ask him. Go ahead. Ask him."

Shayne put up one hand and tugged his ear lobe in a familiar gesture.

"I think I believe you," he said. "That turns off the heat between you and me. I'll tell my people they made a mistake." He sounded sincere. He really did believe the part about Ramos being Frenchy's boy.

Everybody relaxed, though Ramos didn't put his Luger away. He just lowered the muzzle and held it loosely. "You got sense, Shayne,"

he said. "Me, I'm glad. Nobody going to pay me to kill you, so why should I bother? The little lady and I are going to leave here now. Tie him in the chair, honey. In fifteen minutes I'll call the desk of this flea-bag and tell him to come up and cut you loose. Okay?"

Lolita pulled a lamp cord out of the wall, yanked it loose at the lamp end and tied Shayne's hands to the chair behind his back. The big detective made no move to resist.

"Leave him his wallet," Ramos said. "Leave him his gun too. Nobody's mad at nobody any more. Next time I see you, Mike. I hope it's social and not business."

"Likewise," Lolita said with her face close to his.

"I hope so," Shayne agreed. "In spite of himself he couldn't really dislike either the girl nor the cheerful New Orleans hood.

They packed Ramos' clothes into the one bag and left by way of the fire escape at the end of the hall. Two minutes later Shayne had twisted himself loose, as he was sure both of them had known that he would. He went down the stairs and out through the lobby past the dozing desk clerk.

III

BACK AT HIS office Mike Shayne found Lucy Hamilton and Tim Rourke sharing a companionable cup of coffee while they waited for

him to show up. Rourke's was about half and half coffee and rum. From long habit he was able to drink it without showing any immediate effects. Lucy, and Shayne, when he helped himself, took cream instead of rum.

"Hail, maestro," Rourke said as Shayne sat down behind the big desk. "You know Will Gentry is climbing the wall to find out where I got that name you supplied me on the phone. It seems like even the cloak and dagger people on the Potomac are interested in that one."

"You haven't told anybody?"

"Not yet I haven't, Mike, but I don't know how much longer I can hold out. This one was hotter

than the roof of a car parked in the noon sun."

"Just tell them the name was an anonymous tip from a Cuban," Shayne said. "At least that's how I got it."

"There's no way they can disprove it," Lucy Hamilton added. "Michael, the Chief wants you to call him. Something about last night's killing — "

"If he calls again, I'm still out. I've just been having a chat with the killer, and I need time to think it over." He gave them a suitably scaled-down version of his talk with Ramos. Then he dug into his safe for a notebook covering his time in New Orleans and wrote something on a slip of paper.

"Try these numbers in order till you locate Big Frenchy," he told Lucy. "If he's not at one of them, get somebody to pass the word for him to call me."

"Call you collect?" Lucy asked.

"Sure, collect. No. Tim, don't print this yet. You know you'll have the story as soon as it is a story. Till then just quote 'a usually reliable source' as saying the killing had nothing to do with exile Cuban activity. That's what most people are interested in at this point, anyway."

"Is it true?" Rourke asked.

Shayne tugged at his ear lobe. "That depends on how much of what Ramos told me is true. I think Big Frenchy did send him. He'd never have thought that up for himself. What I need to know and don't have yet is the name of the man who gave Frenchy the contract."

"How do you expect to find that out?" Rourke asked.

"I'm going to fish in all the muddy waters I can find and see what I catch."

"You know I want a specific tip," Rourke said. "Sometimes when you get to generalizing like that you sound like a Madison Avenue advertising executive." He poured more rum into his coffee cup.

"Michael," Lucy Hamilton said, "I've got the party you wanted."

Shayne took the phone.

"Frenchy," he said, "this is Mike Shayne. You remember. I met you on the Dulcos smuggling go-round five years ago. Yes, I'm still in business. Now look — there's a character up here tells me he works for you. If he does, I won't bother him any more. It won't cost you a thing to admit it. He calls himself Jose Ramos."

After a long pause. "I don't know no Jose Ramos."

"Maybe that's not his name then," Shayne said. "If Will Gentry picks him up, he'll find out for sure, and I have to know. So do some more thinking. What does a cut off right ear mean to you?"

"Now look here, Shayne. How do I know there ain't no catch in this call? You say it won't cost me nothing and then you threaten me with the fuzz. How do I know?"

"You know," Shayne said, "be-

cause I tell you it's so. Don't be a fool, Frenchy. Think back. In all the years I spent in your town my word was always good. You can ask anybody. But you don't have to. You already know it."

"I gotta think."

"Think fast," Shayne said. "I'm paying for this call and I don't have your sources of income."

"Okay, okay. That sounds like the Shayne I remember. Without admitting a thing now — there's a boy with a half ear does favors for me sometimes. Only his name ain't Ramos. He's a good Cajun boy, and it's Rameaux. Jean Rameaux."

"Thanks, Frenchy," Shayne said. "That's what I wanted to know."

"I hope the boy ain't in no trouble, Shayne."

"Not with me he isn't. You tell him to come home before the homicide squad sees him, though. You do that."

"If I see him," LaBorde said, "I'll give him your regards. Okay?" He hung up the phone.

"Does that prove anything to you, Mike?" Rourke asked.

"All it proves is that Ramos-Rameaux was telling the truth about the one point where I already believed him. Beyond that it doesn't help me or my client."

"Are you going to tell Gentry who to look for?" Lucy asked.

"Not now," Shayne said. "Not at all unless I have to. Jean could have killed me an hour back. When he left me tied up so I could work loose, he was trusting me not to blow the whistle. Besides, this killing isn't the sort of thing the locals usually handle. Who am I to get James Bond put in the jug?"

"Who are you to condone murder?" Lucy asked.

"I'm not condoning," Shayne said, "but maybe this is a war. You don't call General MacArthur a murderer, do you?"

"All right," Tim Rourke said. "You like the guy. You made your point. Now what?"

"Now," Shayne said. "I've got to do what the boys out at the university would call extensive personal research. I've got to go places and see people and ask questions nobody wants to answer."

"Take me along, Mike."

"Not at this stage, Tim. I have to see some real rough characters. You can help more by getting all the facts you can about the power structure in Dade County Bolita. I don't mean just the numbers racket. Bolita, the Havana houses. Who are the heads, the captains. Above all who bankrolls them. What has the grapevine got? Above that, what do your editors have that they can't prove or print?"

"Yes, master," Rourke said. "As you command. Is that all, master?"

Shayne laughed. "Okay, I'm sorry. It's just that I need information if I'm going to wrap up a story for you."

"I keep forgetting," Rourke said. "All the world's a story and we the

actors in it. The story must go on. By stagecoach and pony express the story must get through."

"You said it," Shayne said, "not me."

He went downstairs and got his car out of the parking lot down the block. His first destination was a fifty thousand dollar home on a canal in the expensive Keystone Point subdivision of North Miami. He drove north on the boulevard till he found the ornamental gates of the development and then turned east towards the Bay.

The streets twisted and curved among canals and were named instead of numbered so it took him a while to find the address he wanted. It was a brand-new waterfront house with a three-car garage and completely air conditioned.

The name plate on the door said simply *Marcos* and the house was so well insulated that Shayne could not hear the bell ring when he pushed the button.

Somebody must have heard and come to look him over through the one way glass bull's eye in the heavy, carved door. A communicator above the door came to life, and an amplified voice inquired, "What do you want? Who is it?"

"I'm Mike Shayne. I want to talk to El Grande. It's important for both of us."

There was a long pause while somebody went for instructions. Then the same voice spoke again. "I'm sorry sir. Mr. Marcos is indisposed and cannot see you this morning."

"It's not morning," Shayne said. "It's noon. You go tell him to change his mind. That is, unless he'd rather talk to Will Gentry, the F. B. I., and the Intelligence people. And hurry up. It's hot out here."

After a short pause the door opened and Shayne was admitted to the foyer. Two white-coated, swarthy young men waited for him there. One of them deftly frisked Shayne and put his gun into the drawer of a marble-topped reception table.

They led Shayne through a richly furnished living room where his feet sank into deep piled, gold colored carpeting almost to the ankles. Behind the house and fronting on a wide canal and a sleek motor cruiser at a private dock, was a glassed in Florida Room. The lower five feet of the glass enclosure looked to Shayne's experienced eye like the bulletproof variety.

There was nothing really remarkable about the man who waited for Shayne there. He was just a tough, hard-faced fat man. His name was Guilermo Marcos, but he was called "El Grande." The house and the boat and his Rolls Royce car were paid for by the profits of the biggest Havana House in South Florida.

"Well?" he said to Shayne without getting up or taking the cigar out of his mouth.

The big detective picked out a comfortable chair and sat down.

He'd taken off his hat, but now he stuck it back on his head.

"Your manners are lousy," he said. "You ought to be more polite when a man comes to do you a favor."

"What favor," the fat man asked, "can somebody like you do for me?"

"The police already know who was shot last night. They know who pulled the trigger — and who put out the contract to begin with."

Marcos let his lips skin back in a vulpine imitation of a smile. "Should I care about these things?"

"You should care that the Federal people in Washington know all the police do," Shayne said. "You should care that they're looking for more information. This isn't a local matter. This is international politics. Even a big man could get hurt."

Marcos regarded him as if he were something caught crawling on the wall. He said nothing.

Shayne was the first to speak. "There's word around town that your bank's been taking a loss lately."

Marcos dropped cigar ash on his expensive slacks and brushed it off onto the tile floor.

"We pay off the winners," he said. "Some weeks more are lucky than usual." He sounded bored.

"You ever think of being an actor?" Shayne asked.

"What?"

"You'd make a good one. I'll grant you that. But I know, Marcos. I know you've taken a beating and a bad beating — and it had nothing at all to do with anybody's luck. You can lay off lucky bets and insure yourself. You couldn't lay off these because they weren't lucky. Somebody already knew the winning numbers before they were released. Somebody's taking you for every dime you've got because he's not betting at all. He's cashing in on a sure thing."

By this time Marcos was trying so hard to show no emotion that he looked like the lead character of an old movie production of "The Man in the Iron Mask."

"You're crazy," he said. "Just plain crazy, Mr. Shayne."

"No," Shayne said. "I'm not crazy Mr. Marcos. You are, if you don't tell me the truth. I think I can help you, but not if you don't open up."

The great stone face showed no reaction. The eyes watched Shayne with an almost feral rage, but the fat man stayed silent.

Shayne decided to play his hole card.

"You may be able to con even the Federals," he said. "Who am I to say you can't? But the smart ones in this town you can't fool. Already they are laughing at you. The great El Grande has met his match. He is being robbed every week and he knows it and can do nothing. Soon he will be a poor man like us, they say. Then they will stop laughing, and make him eat garbage as we do.

He can no longer call himself —"

"Stop!" the fat man almost yelled. "Stop. No one dares say such things."

"Not to your face," Shayne said. "They don't quite dare say it to your face yet, but they will soon enough. You can give odds they'll laugh in your face inside of thirty days. I'll cover any money you have that says they won't."

"I'll take that," Marcos said. "You think I let anbody get away with this? You're crazy. Nobody can do that to —." He realized what he was starting to say and snapped his mouth shut. "Get out."

"You don't have to say it." Shayne said. "I read you loud and clear. They'll be dead like the little man last night. Only they won't. Do you think the Bearded One in the National Palace in Havana is afraid of you? He has an army and a secret police to take care of El Grande.

"To him you're *el payoso* the clown, *el perrito* the little dog, *la pulga,* the flea he stamps on, as he will stamp you. The exiles here will stamp you if he doesn't. Killing will embarrass them. Or perhaps you will seem a thorn in the side of Washington. You will only go to prison then. You will be very lucky."

Marcos was still fighting for self control. His cigar had gone out and he relit it from a gold lighter set with pearls. "So why do you come and tell me these things, Mr. Shayne? Is it because you too want to laugh?"

"I never laugh at a man of power," Mike Shayne said. "My principal sent me with a message. You will stop all killing as of now. Show mercy, and perhaps mercy will be shown to you. Tell me all you know of these matters — losses, names of the agents, all you know. Suggest some peaceful way to stop the drain of dollars to an enemy. Everybody wants that."

"I must think," Marcos said. "You have made one mistake. I had no killing done last night. I have thought of it, yes, but the same things you mentioned now came to my mind also. Who was it that was killed?"

"Alcide Blanco," Shayne said and watched the man's eyes widen in shock.

"Por Dios!" Marcos said. *"El Escorpion!* Now surely death will come blowing on the south wind to this city. I must think. I will let you know."

He rang for his two guards to show Shayne out. The big redhead got up lazily and turned to face them where they stood side by side. As others had done before them they underestimated him. His big hands which had been dangling at his sides swept up faster than they could follow. He caught each one by the ear and cracked their heads together with a sound like knocking two cocoanuts. They were out before they hit the floor.

"Next time your boys want my gun," he said, "have them ask for it politely. Don't get up. They aren't dead — and I can let myself out."

IV

AS MIKE SHAYNE drove south along the Boulevard again he was thinking hard. He was pretty sure the name of Blanco had genuinely frightened the Bolita baron. He also had confirmation of the rumor that the Havana Houses had been hit disastrously.

However that was about all he was sure of. His instinct was to discount Marcos' denial that he'd bought the killing. The man was mean, cruel and arrogant. He was perfectly capable of having a regiment killed to protect his own source of income. To be on the safe side though, Shayne would keep on spreading his message and watching for proofs.

He drove south to 36th Street, then turned west into the section called Allapatta. Long a stronghold for previously rural Georgians and Floridians, this part of town was now occupied by almost equal numbers of Negroes and Cuban exiles.

In the back room of a thoroughly integrated bar he found a black man with diamonds set in his front incisors, an Italian silk suit, and the improbable name of Capacious Flanagan.

Flanagan gave Shayne a clean chair, a clean glass and a bottle of

excellent quality Scotch to pour himself a drink. He listened carefully to the detective's story.

"I've heard of you, Mr. Shayne," he said. "They say you don't talk foolish, and that you are a fair and intelligent man. So why do you come to me with this?"

Shayne said, "I'll be frank with you. I've heard much the same things said of you. Also I've been told around town that you have the number two Bolita House in this end of Florida."

Flanagan gave him an intelligent glance over a smile that incongruously showed his diamond studded teeth. "And that leads you to think that I would have ordered a public killing?"

"No," Shayne said. "I'll be honest with you. It doesn't. In fact you're the least likely suspect of anyone

I'm talking to. It's just that you might see the advantage to everybody concerned of telling me who did order it—or at least your educated guess as to who did. In the long run you'd have more to gain by my knowing before the police dig it out for themselves." He poured himself two fingers of the scotch and drank it down. It was very good.

"I appreciate your confidence, Mr. Shayne," Flanagan said. "I wish I could give you even the educated guess you speak of, because that would mean I'd know a lot more than I do now. Of course there are other considerations that would keep me silent. I'm not hiding anything I do know. If this keeps up, of course the police will come in. That will hurt all of us. The Cuban armies-in-exile could boycott our Houses or even take more drastic action. If I were you I'd ask the men at the top of this business."

"I've already talked to El Grande," Shayne said. "He's not very cooperative, but he is scared about out of his skin. I don't think he'd have dared to order that particular man killed."

They sat companionably for some minutes, each with his own thoughts. Cap Flanagan was the first to speak.

"This is a guess and nothing more," he said. "As a detective you've probably had the thought for yourself."

"Try me," Shayne said.

"It's just possible that killing was planned mostly to set the existing Houses against each other. It would end up with us fighting each other, the police, the government and both groups of Cubans. There's always people think they can fish best in troubled waters, Mr. Shayne. You know that, and things is already getting a bit too riled up and muddy for my liking. Or am I just mixing metaphors?"

"That's the first really smart suggestion I've heard," Mike Shayne said, stretching his long legs out in front of him and tilting his chair back. "The only thing is—to whose advantage would it be? Not to either Cuban faction, I think. The Castro people are happy with your world as it is, so much so I think they'll give you each breathing spells rather than drive you out of business."

"They're a lot closer to just that than anybody realizes," Cap Flanagan said. "I been hoping they'd be smart enough not to cut off their supply of golden eggs, but I don't know. Five weeks straight now I've been hit with ten dollar winning bets. Ordinarily I can take a lucky punch and roll with it. The odds are one thousand to one against any one number coming up, and we only pay off six hundred to one. But six or twelve thousand extra dollars a week is hard even on a banker my size."

"Just who's been doing the winning?" Shayne asked.

"I thought of that, Mr. Shayne. I

sure did. My runners give me the name of every winner. Only they don't make a pattern. Never the same man twice, and not even all of them Cubans. I think they threaten or pay somebody to make the bet for them. I can't account for it any other way."

"Give me the names anyway, and I'll check them out," Shayne said. "If I turn up anything I'll let you know about it."

He got a booming laugh in reply. "You don't seriously think I could do that? If it ever got said that my winners been fingered to a shamus, I wouldn't have one regular customer left. Course, you can probably get the information by asking around the bars, but I can't give it to you."

"Don't blame me for trying," Shayne said. "Just one more thing, Mr. Flanagan. I'm being well paid to clear this mess. I don't take a job unless I fell I can deliver. You know I like you, and I don't really think you're the man I want. For both our sakes I hope not, because if you were I'd have to drop the boom on you whether I liked it or not."

"Amen," Flanagan said.

They got up and shook hands. Cap Flanagan made a point of walking through the bar to the street door with Mike Shayne, talking pleasantly all the way. The customers tried hard not to show how closely they were watching. Shayne knew the word would go round that Cap Flanagan thought he was on the level. That might save his life at some future date. Flanagan was a respected man in his community.

At the door they shook hands again, and Shayne walked over to his car. A teenager was snapping his hubcaps back onto the wheels under the watchful eye of one of Cap's bartenders.

"Just a little misunderstanding, Mr. Shayne," the bartender explained. "This young man, he rightly didn't know you was a friend of the boss."

"A natural mistake," Shayne said and laughed in spite of himself. He gave the man a ten dollar bill and the boy a five. "I'm beholden for your courtesy."

The next address on his list was a location on the near north side over by the expressway and river and just about due north from the Orange Bowl sports stadium. It was an old two-and-a-half story concrete house that had been a mansion once. The front door was solid Honduras mahogany. There were ornamental grilles barring the windows—bronze, not cast iron.

This had been a top residential neighborhood twenty years back. Now it was pretty well ruined by traffic arteries and the new expressway which cut the houses off from the river like a Chinese wall.

A small glass port in the door opened when he rang the bell. "I'm looking for B. J. Ramirez," he told the door.

"Who are you?"

He thought the voice was femin-

ine, but the nearby late afternoon traffic was so heavy that he couldn't be sure. "My name is Michael Shayne and I'm a private investigator. I just want to ask a few questions."

"There was a call about you," the voice said. "He said not to let you in, but I will anyhow. I've heard of you and it's all good."

When he got into the hall, Shayne saw that he'd indeed been talking to a woman. The light was poor and all he could tell at first was that she was blonde and almost as tall as he. The hall itself was dusty and almost bare of furnishings. Instead of the deep-piled carpets favored by El Grande there was only a worn strip of runner rug under foot.

"Come on," the woman said in a pleasant voice.

She took Shayne through a door at the right rear of the hall to a room that had once been a den or hobby room. But it had been refurnished as an office by putting in filing cabinets, a couple of desks and an old-fashioned iron safe in one corner. Heavy drapes across the windows kept anyone outside the house from seeing in.

"Sit down," she said.

The light was better here so that he could get his first good look at her. She was a big blonde of the type Mike Shayne had always favored. It wasn't only that she came within an inch of his own considerable height. She was big breasted, broad shouldered, wide in the hips and big boned. Her big mouth was red and moist and generous. The clear grey eyes were widely spaced and her brow was high and domed. In spite of all that size there wasn't an ounce of real fat on her anywhere and she moved and sat with natural grace.

"Have a good look while you're at it, Mike," she said, and laughed low in her throat.

He jumped in spite of himself. A man seldom saw a woman like this one and the sight needed to be enjoyed.

"I'm sorry," he said. "No, of course I'm not sorry. Still—I came on business to see B. J. Ramirez. Will you get him for me."

He could see her tense, and her look was almost belligerent. Then she laughed again; though this time it took some trying.

"How could you know?" she said, half to herself. "Mister, I'm Betty Jane Ramirez, and that's the only B.J. in the business. Now if you don't want to do business with a woman—"

Shayne recovered fast. "As long as you're the woman, I'd prefer it," he said. "All I had was a list of Bolita Houses, and yours rates number three."

"Next year I'll try a little harder," she said. "And now suppose you tell me why I was told not to let you in."

"If you were told that," Shayne said, "it had to be by El Grande. I think he's afraid I'll turn over the stone he keeps his secrets under.

Either that or open the wrong door and let a skeleton out."

"That sounds like His Obesity," she said. "You ever see him without his hair-piece, Mike? He looks like some kind of reptile, like what we called a mud-turtle when I was a kid. Has all the cheerful, kindly expression of a big old snapping turtle being hauled out of a muddy pond."

They both laughed. Then she stood up. "Oh, hell, Mike. Come on upstairs where it's comfortable and we can have a real talk. You'd get there sooner or later anyhow. This office is strictly for effect on bums, and you're no bum."

"Why thank you, Betty Jane," he said. "I like you too. I'd be honored."

"So you would, but most men aren't smart enough to know it," she said. "Why didn't I ever meet you before?"

"Probably too busy minding the store," he said, "or did you come over late?"

"Come over? Oh, you mean from Cuba. Don't let the Ramirez fool you, buster. That was my husband's name till he got shot on the beach at Bay of Pigs. I was born and raised a Frazier right here in town. This was my father's house, and I was born in it. I only keep my married name because so many of my customers like it."

While they talked she led Shayne up a flight of broad, curving stairs to a second floor sitting room at the

front of the house. Big windows faced the Orange Bowl and let in the afternoon sun. The room was comfortably and beautifully furnished, mostly with hundred and fifty year old Greek revival antiques There were a couple of rather stiff looking portraits on the walls and a landscape in the English romantic style.

"Betty Jane lives here," she explained and waved him to a seat on the couch. "The office downstairs belongs strictly to B.J. Ramirez. Will you have a drink?"

"Only a small one," Shayne said. "When I leave here I'll have to go back to work."

"Oh," she said, pleased. "Nicely spoken, Mike. I take that as a real compliment."

"That's how it was intended," the big redhead assured her.

She got out a bottle of good rum and a pitcher of lime-ade and put them on the coffee-table in front of the couch. Then she brought out a couple of heavy sandwich glass tum-

blers and came and sat down by him. Shayne watched as she poured herself about two fingers and filled the glass the rest of the way with lime from the pitcher. When she was through he mixed one equally mild for himself. It was first rate rum.

"Now," she said easily, "let's have your side of this monkey business. El Grande called me, like you guessed. He thinks you're strictly poison. Tried to tell me you wanted to blackmail all the Houses to pay protection, and bring Castro's licensed killers down on us. In fact he went so far as to say I should dope your drink when you got here and call his boys to come and get you."

"You didn't buy it?"

"Of course I didn't, Mike. Marcos is a reptile. I wouldn't take his word for what time it was."

Mike Shayne gave her a brief rundown on the situation. "It's trouble for everybody unless this killing business is stopped in a hurry. Now I know who actually pulled the trigger, but I don't know the really important name, the one who bought and paid for the killing."

"You want it from the House bankers?"

"I want it, or anything else that will help me get it. After all you're the people with the most to lose and so the most incentive to get it straightened out."

"Am I a suspect, Mike?"

He looked her right in the eyes. "Technically you were until a few minutes ago. Now I don't think you could be. You might kill in self defense, but not by hiring it done from out of town. You'd just get mad and go break somebody's neck with your bare hands."

"You read me well for a ten minute acquaintance," she said.

" 'Genius all over the world stands hand in hand'. That's from Melville," Shayne said.

"Of course it is. I think I can complete the quote." She thought for a moment. " 'And one shock of recognition runs the whole circle round'."

"That's it."

"I haven't thought of that since college," she said. "I like you, Mike."

"I heard it from a crooked palm reader," he said. "She used it to soften up the mooch. I like you too."

"To get back to the point, I'll tell you now that I had nothing to do with that killing. I'd thought of something like that of course, but it never seemed practical. We couldn't kill off the whole Castro cloak and dagger organization. He's got an endless supply. We couldn't even get close to the people over there who give the orders. Hell, we can't even admit publicly that we're being raided. Our local customers would lose confidence in us. They might even think we were in on the fix. You see?"

"I see," Shayne said. "Just what are you going to do? I mean you personally, Betty Jane. Will you just

sit still till they bleed the last few drops out of you? Sooner or later they will, you know."

"I know," she said, "but of course I won't wait for that. I worked too hard getting my stake for this business. I gave up too many things I might have had to risk losing this business without making some sort of fight. I'm not sure just what, but I won't be taking any suggestions from El Grande. I'll give you my solemn word on that."

"I'll take it," Shayne said.

"Meanwhile I'll pray you find what you're looking for, Mike. I really and truly will. Selfish of me, but I'd rather have you do it than try myself."

"Fine," Shayne said. "I can always use prayers. Now how about me taking you out for cocktails and dinner?"

She looked at her watch. "I can't Mike. I wish I could. I really do. Tonight I have to have a business conference with my partner."

"Your what?"

"Didn't you know?" She laughed at him and finished her drink. "A woman can't handle this operation all alone. I need a junior partner, male, to tend to some of the details."

"By junior partner, you don't by any chance mean another husband?" Shayne asked.

"No," she said. "No. I think you know him, Mike. Billy Tom Dancer from Small Deer Key. You must have heard of him."

Shayne had. Billy Tom Dancer was somewhere between eighty and a hundred years old. In 1907 he'd been a defendant in one of the last trials for piracy ever held in a United States court. He'd been around Biscayne Bay so long he still remembered what to do with coontie root.

She must have known what was in Shayne's mind, for she got up and stood right before him. With her feet wide apart, hands on hips, shoulders back to thrust out her perfect breasts and eyes wide open she was a magnificient figure of a woman.

"Am I attractive, buster?" she asked as if defying him to deny an obvious fact. His expression gave her the answer she wanted. "Uncle Billy Tom's just a mite old for a husband. Seeing who he is, it's just a mite, but I can't deny it. On the other hand he's not the only man around this town. There's others look at me the way you're looking now. I give them back look for look."

Shayne thought of several of the wrong things to say and managed to leave them unsaid. He came out of the couch with one fluid movement and kissed her full on her red, moist mouth. He didn't grab her or paw her or put his arms around her. He just stood close and kissed her mouth. She moved a little closer and kissed him back and then they both broke back a step. Her face was still only a foot from his.

"Ask me again, soon, Shayne," she said softly.

"I will," he replied. Neither of them was talking about cocktails and dinner.

She walked him down to the front door.

"Keep in touch with me," she said. "I'll let you know anything I hear. This can't go on much longer. Maybe El Grande can stand it, but I'm close to the bottom of the barrel. I know more killing's no answer. I'm looking for a better way now."

V

MIKE SHAYNE put her unlisted phone number in his little black book and drove downtown to his office. Lucy Hamilton and Tim Rourke were waiting for him there. Rourke had worked his way to within a couple of inches of the bottom of a scotch bottle. He was flushed and mellow.

"I was just about to take your true love out to dinner," he told Shayne, "but she insisted on waiting to see if you'd show up. In spite of which I suppose you've been frolicking as usual with sloe-eyed Cuban beauties."

"Never a sloe eye in the whole herd," Shayne said. He got a warm and laughing look from Lucy, so he went on to describe briefly El Grande and Cap Flanagan. "The third was a woman," he said, "but she was blonde and almost as tall as I am."

"Dangerous," Rourke said. "Dangerous. Watch him, Lucy. So what did you discover that I need for my story? Whodunit this time?"

"That's the sad part," Shayne said. "I got very little I didn't know before. Out of fourteen Havana Banks those were the three biggest. They'd be in on anything anybody had, but not one of them will admit to knowing a thing. They're being hit and hit hard and often—and it hurts. How bad it hurts I'm not sure, but not badly enough for killing except possibly in Marcos' case. I'm wondering now if it's worth while to run down the other eleven."

"Here's the list of names and addresses," Roarke said. "Only the total isn't fourteen—it's nineteen we can trace. Probably more. Some of them are new in the business and pretty shakey though."

"Thanks, Tim." Shayne passed the list to Lucy to file.

"That reminds me, Michael," she said. "Your girl friend from last night—at least that's the way she described herself—has been trying to reach you. She left a number and says she'll answer it herself. Neither of you is to mention any names because the phone may be bugged."

"That would be the old Senator's granddaughter," Shayne said. "Let's have the number."

He recognized Isabel Garcia's voice as soon as she answered the phone. All he said was: "I just got the message to call you."

"I hope you haven't forgotten your invitation to take me to dinner tonight," she said so quickly as al-

most to run the words together. "I find I can make it after all. Can you meet me at eight in the lobby of the Four Ambassadors?"

"Wouldn't you rather I picked you up at home?"

"No. It would be better just to meet in the lobby. I promise you I'll be prompt."

He told the other two what she wanted. "It's too bad. I'd thought we might eat together. Why don't you two pick up a steak and put it on the expense account for this job?"

"Why," Rourke said, "I'm not sure I wouldn't rather eat at the Four Ambassadors. Might pick up an item for the society notes if I kept my eye on you."

"You can do me a lot more good," Shayne said, "by going over to Headquarters and finding out what Will and his boys have got by now on this whole business. If he asks, tell him I've nothing new. Right now that's too close to the truth to be funny. Lucy, you can close up here and go on home after you eat. I don't think I'll need you for anything till morning."

"I'll be there with the first aid kit if you need me," she said and laughed. "Seriously, Michael, be careful. There's some very hard people mixed up in this."

"I don't have to fight them," Shayne said, "as long as I can outthink them. I'll try to stay out of trouble, Angel."

Shayne went by his own place for a clean white shirt and a dark tie. Then he walked the few blocks to the exclusive and expensive new hotel apartment complex and took a chair in the lobby.

Almost everyone who passed through the luxurious lobby could rate as a V.I.P. He recognized two judges, Mayor Hall of Dade County, a United States Senator, the last year's Orange Bowl Festival Queen, and a rear admiral in summer whites. It amused him to think that Isabel had deliberately picked this spot to meet, but at the same time it increased his respect for her intelligence. Neither a Jean Rameaux nor an Alcide Blanco type would be apt to appear in this place and recognize them.

She was as good as her word about being prompt, and tactful enough to have assumed that Shayne wouldn't bother about a tuxedo. The ice-blue cocktail dress she'd picked for herself was striking, but not enough so to draw undue attention.

They took an elevator up to the best of the several restaurants operated within the resort complex. Shayne surprised her by ordering for them both from a massive French language menu. The bill for his selections came to a total of sixty-seven dollars.

"Now tell me," she said when they were eating, "have you been able to learn anything of importance?"

Shayne gave her a fairly comprehensive rundown of his day's activity.

"Can you trust this Big Frenchy's

word?" she asked. "It is highly significant if someone here hired an outside killer."

"I think I can trust his admission that Ramos-Rameaux is his boy," Shayne said. "If he wanted to lie about that it would be to deny any connection. The thing I've still got to find out is who hired Frenchy. How about one of your exile groups?"

"I'm not positive," she said over a forkfull of beef Wellington, "but I don't really think so. They might kill, but they're all angry and emotional and somewhat naive by American standards. It would not occur to them to deprive themselves of the personal satisfaction of settling the account with a secret service agent by themselves. If they'd done it, he would have been knifed in a dark alley instead of shot in a public place. How about your Bolita people?"

"Rationally they'd have nothing to gain by starting a killing feud with the Castro government. I think the Negro and the woman see that clearly enough. El Grande may know it too, but only intellectually. The man's emotions are conditioned to killing. He's the sort that kills by instinct and then finds himself enjoying it. If he got mad enough, he might forget all about caution."

"Our people seem to agree with you, Mike," she said. "On the other hand a man like that is a natural red herring across the trail of some other killer, and somebody might be quick to take advantage in order to step out of character."

"I keep that in mind," Shayne said.

"Good. Now I've some information you may not have gotten around to yet," she said. "The theft of the body last night was engineered by the Cuban secret service. They hoped to get him away before he could be identified as a government agent. The body was taken out Government Cut in a fishing boat and sunk in the Gulf Stream. His death will be announced from Havana later on with pneumonia or heart failure given as a cause."

"Chief Gentry doesn't know that yet?" It was as much as statement on Shayne's part as a question.

"I've no objection to your telling him," she said, "just so long as you don't reveal your source of information. It will free his men for more important things."

"Fine," Shayne said. "At least it'll set his mind at rest to know. One thing more. Once I find out who did this killing and get it stopped, I'm sure you don't want me to stop there—"

"Of course not," she said and smiled at him. "I just assumed you didn't need that spelled out."

"I don't. The next step is to stop the raids on the Bolita Banks. There's only one way I can see in which that can be done."

"And it won't be easy to persuade them to do it," she finished for him. "Our groups can help a

great deal with that problem. Our leaders are highly respected, even by those who don't join us openly. If the bigger banks do what they must, we can certainly help. Any of the smaller outfits that refuse to come in line, won't last long by themselves. The comunists will see the handwriting on the wall and hit them for everything they have."

"That's about the way I figure it," Shayne told her as the waiter brought twin orders of cherries jubilee. "Now have you anything more I should know about any of my suspects?"

"No more facts than you have yourself," she said. "I'd just like to offer one thought. Have you considered that it might be someone we haven't even considered as yet?"

"Of course I have," Shayne said. "I try for an open mind in any case I work on. Besides there are facts I already do know that just don't fit together quite right. You must have spotted them too."

"I just wanted to be sure you had," she said. "Now, Michael Shayne, do you realize we haven't made any final financial arrangement about your own services as yet?"

"I'm willing," he said, "to leave that to your grandfather's sense of what's right."

"Trust the generosity of the man of birth," she said. "You are wise to do that. Grandfather tries to buy the best, and doesn't expect to get it cut rate or marked down. He said to offer you twenty thousand dollars at the conclusion of the case—that is, of course, the successful conclusion—plus the five thousand you already have, plus a minimum of one hundred dollars a day for expenses and plus any special expenses you may feel to be vital."

"That will be perfectly satisfactory," Mike Shayne said. "Now can I see you home?"

"It won't be necessary," she said. "One of Grandfather's young men is waiting in the lobby. It's better that I be seen leaving with him. You can leave in another five minutes or so."

When she'd gone Shayne sat down and lit a cigar. After about ten minutes he paid the check and went out to the elevator. As far as he could see no one either followed or showed any interest in his movements.

As he crossed the lobby from the

elevator bank Mike Shayne had his first real shock of the evening. A party of four men had just finished registering at the desk. As he watched they turned away, followed by a couple of heavy-laden hops and headed his way, Shayne put up both hands before his face as if lighting a cigarette.

It had been a long time, and he might not be recognized at all, but he wasn't taking chances. The short, powerfully built man in the lead was Big Frenchy LaBorde.

Shayne didn't think he'd been recognized. As far as he could see, the men had ignored him completely. None the less the encounter shook him up. Why had Frenchy come to Miami at a time when a known associate of his was being hunted for murder? Had his principal called him in for a conference? or to place another order? Was he here to collect for the hit already completed—or on some scheme of his own which might or might not concern the Bolita affair. Offhand Shayne couldn't tell.

Shayne walked back across the Brickel Avenue Bridge to his office where he still had his car in the parking lot. At this early hour the downtown section was still a blaze of light. He looked at the tall buildings against a star spangled sky with the affection born of long familiarity.

At the office he found that Lucy Hamilton had taken him at his word and gone home, leaving only a night light burning on his desk in the big outer office.

Their two apartments and the office were linked by a special phone hookup. He pushed the button for her extension and shortly heard her warm, familiar tones.

"Just wanted you to know I was checking in," he said. "Anything I ought to know?"

"Nothing except that Will Gentry's still trying to reach you," she said. "Do you need me for anything, Michael? I was just starting to wash my hair, but it can wait."

"I wouldn't think of making it wait," Shayne said. "No, Angel, I've got everything under control so far. By the way, would you still recognize Frenchy LaBorde, if you saw him?"

"I think—I'm sure I would. Why?"

"He just checked into the Four Ambassadors with three of his mob. If he calls, you don't know where I am. If you see him coming, cross the street, Angel. Fast."

"You can trust me," she said. "I never liked that one. Does Will know he's here?"

"I'm going to call him and see," Shayne said.

He was as good as his word. The burly chief was still at his office as Shayne had expected he'd be. "I understand the city commissioner's going to vote you a new cigar," Shayne said. "Must figure the old one was killed in line of duty."

"Mike," Gentry said, "why in hell

didn't you call before this? What are you holding out this time?"

"Nothing at all, Will. To prove it —do you know Big Frenchy La-Borde's in town?"

"Yes I knew that. My boys at the airport check in all really important visitors. How did you find out?"

"I just watched him at the check-in desk of the Four Ambassadors. I honestly don't know what brought him to town, Will, or I'd tell you. I think it might concern last night's shooting though."

"Oh it would; would it?" Gentry asked. "And how would you know?"

"Just a hunch," Shayne said. "On the other hand here's some news you can take for truth. The morgue was robbed last night by pros on the Castro payroll. They didn't like the idea their little buddy might be identified, so they've sunk his bones in the Gulf Stream."

"Wait a minute," Gentry protested. "I'll have to tell the Federals where I got that. They're all hot and bothered about the little fellow now, So where did you hear it?"

"Just tell them it's common knowledge in the high echelon circles of the Free-Cuba people. If it isn't already, it soon will be for sure."

"So that's who you're working for this time?" the Chief graunted. "Anything else you want the government to know? In that case I'll tell you we're closing in on the notch-eared gunsel. And what do you know? A man who fits your description was looking for him this morning."

"Must have been one of many doubles," Shayne said.

"Where is he, Mike? You might as well tell me. We're going to get him anyway, but you could save us some trouble. Or does he work for your new friends too? For once, come clean, why don't you? Remember this is Federal business. I'm not sure I can cover you even if I want to this time."

"I don't know where he is right now, Will. I mean it," Shayne said. "Maybe I did find him and maybe I didn't, but he's moved since morning. Maybe more than once. I can't tell you any more because that's all I know. My clients have had nothing to do with any killings. They want the shooting to stop as bad as you do. Maybe even more."

"Where is he, Mike?"

"I said I don't know where he is. I wouldn't lie to you after all these years."

Shayne stayed at his desk a few minutes longer trying to straighten out his thinking. He kept feeling the answers he wanted were right under his nose, if only he could spot them. It wasn't any use. He just found himself going back over the data he already had without a ray of new light to illuminate the problem.

The phone on his desk rang again. He decided to answer it.

"Mr. Shayne?" The voice was both female and frightened. "You got to help him, Mr. Shayne. You

got to. They're killing him right now."

"Hold on," Shayne said. "Who's killing who? Who are you?"

"Killing Jose," the voice said. "This is Lolita. He could have killed you, and he didn't. You owe him a life."

"Okay, okay. I'll do what I can. Where is all this happening?"

She named him a street corner only a few blocks away. "Stand under the street light. I'll come to you. But hurry. I am afraid."

Shayne walked as fast as he could make it. He figured to run would attract too much attention and to get his car out of the lot take more time than it was worth. The corner she'd named was nearby in a section of rundown houses and pitiful little second hand stores. The whole area was slated to be torn down anyway to make way for a proposed branch of the public junior college, so the owners didn't bother their heads about paint or repairs. If a building or two fell down before it was torn down, there'd be small loss.

Lolita saw the tall figure of Mike Shayne coming down the street and darted out of a dark doorway to meet him. She wore a tight knitted blouse, a light blue mini-skirt that was little more than a wide belt in size, and high shoes, which she kicked off and left so she could run faster. She was gasping for breath and didn't even try to talk.

She led Shayne halfway down the block and into a long dark hallway. Shayne recognized the building. Years ago it had been a tourist home. Now the rooms had been cut up by partitions, hot plates installed, and the sign in front changed to read *"Efficiency Apartments"* for rent. It was a misleading sign. Each four or five apartments shared a bath, and the only refrigeration was furnished by ancient soft-drink coolers sitting in the halls.

Lolita ran up to the second floor and back along a hall lit by one fifteen-watt light bulb. When Shayne saw that the door where she paused had already been forced he tried to stop her from going in. She wouldn't be stopped.

Shayne followed her in and flipped the switch that turned on a weak overhead light. Lolita moaned and shrank back against his chest. Through the thin knitted garment her body felt warm and young.

Jean-Jose was on the bed, and the sheets were red and brown with dried and fresh blood. He'd been knifed in the chest and his throat cut. Though fully dressed he might have been killed in his sleep. Certainly he'd had no chance to fight back, or even get up off the filthy bed.

Shayne frisked the corpse swiftly. The automatic he'd had earlier in the day was still holstered under his left arm and the wallet was in his pocket. Shayne dropped both in his own jacket. The silencer had been taken off the gun. It was probable he'd put it in his cheap suitcase to

make the gun less awkward to wear.

"Tell me about it," he said to Lolita.

She was sitting in the room's single straight chair with both hands in front of her face so she wouldn't have to watch the body. Her words came out low and muffled.

"He was a nice man," she said. "I liked him. He was good to Lolita. Now look at him. Look at him. It happens to everyone who is good to Lolita. I am cursed."

Shayne put his hand on her bowed head and stroked her naturally wavy hair.

"It's not that bad," he said. "This was a violent man. He knew he had to die by violence. It is not your fault, Lolita. Not your fault."

He went on stroking and speaking quietly for some minutes until she was able to answer his questions.

After they'd left the hotel that morning she'd brought Jose to this place. He said he wanted a cheap, safe place to lie up "just for a couple of days". Then he was going to take her with him to New Orleans. He had a bottle of rum in his suitcase and they drank some and spent the afternoon together.

After a while they slept, to wake only a half or three quarters of an hour back. Lolita had decided to go out and get them a bucket of fried chicken to eat. That had probably saved her life. They both got out of bed and dressed.

She went out with some money he gave her, but she hadn't gotten

more than halfway to the corner when a car came into the street fast and slammed to a stop in front of the building she'd just left. Two men got out and ran into the building. Both were dressed in dark suits and hats, but she couldn't see their faces. Moments later she saw the light go on in the room, and heard crashing noises and yells. In that neighborhood nobody paid any attention.

Because she was badly frightened she ran till she almost fell into a public phone booth on the corner of a block. Because she was who and what she was, she called Mike Shayne instead of the police.

"All right," Shayne said. "We'll get out of here. I'll see that no harm comes to you."

He wondered why he believed her story, why he didn't accuse her of selling out the man to his executioners. Most girls in her trade would have been capable of that, but she seemed genuinely grief stricken.

He switched off the light, picked

up the suitcase and took her out in the hall. There were footsteps and low voices on the stairs in front of the building. Shayne didn't want to be seen. He put his arm around Lolita, let himself slump and stagger a little and turned towards the rear stairwell just in time to hide his face from the men coming up in front. Out of the corner of his eye he saw blue uniforms among them.

He didn't dare try to leave by the stairs. There'd be men outside both doors. There was a pay phone on the wall, near the room he'd just left. A couple of apartments back, there was an open door to mark an apartment not yet rented. Shayne went in with Lolita like a drunk bringing in a prostitute. He could hear someone knocking on the door behind which the body lay.

There was very little time before they'd start searching the building. When they did, they'd remember seeing him in the hall. Shayne moved fast. He raised the one double-winged window and found, as he'd hoped, that it opened onto a rusty iron fire escape. The steps led down to an alley between this building and the next. He lifted the girl through the window ahead of him and handed her the suitcase.

"Go on," he whispered. "Get into the house next door and hide till you can get away. If you're caught, ask for me. Don't say anything to anybody unless I'm there. Now go."

She went lightly down the ancient, rusted-out contraption; and he saw her lift herself up a couple of steps and through a side door of the other house.

About that time the men in the hall stopped knocking and pushed open the door of the room where the dead man lay. He saw flashlights and heard them yell. Shayne went out the window as deftly and quietly as a big cat. The whole fire escape creaked and groaned under his weight. He decided to jump clear before it collapsed under him.

Be before he could, one of the steps broke under his foot with a crack and screech of tearing metal. He kept himself from falling by sheer strength of arm and shoulder, but the jagged metal tore his pants leg and stabbed at his calf.

The noise was heard by the police of course. Faces, flashlights and guns appeared at the window of the murder room.

"My God," said a shocked official voice, "It's the Chief's pet shamus!"

Shayne knew when he'd had it. He said nothing and did nothing until they came and got him. Because they were afraid the whole fire escape would come down at once, they sent for a fire truck and put up a ladder. Somebody climbed up with a hacksaw and cut the jagged splinter of metal that pinned his leg.

As they worked Will Gentry's official car came wheeling up the street with its blue police dome light flashing and stopped right at the mouth of the alley. The burly Chief piled out, accompanied by his driver

and confidential aide, Lieutenant Maine, and by a highly amused Tim Rourke.

The lean reporter had obviously been drinking. He took one look at Mike Shayne, whose leg was still caught in the broken fire escape step, and began to whoop with laughter. It was so infectious that some of the uniformed and plain-clothes men in the alley began to laugh too.

Chief Will Gentry was in no laughing mood.

"You infernal idiot," he said to Shayne, "I told you some day you'd get yourself into something you couldn't get out of, and I couldn't afford to ignore. Now you've done it."

"Sure he has," Rourke said between bursts of laughter. "The world's greatest private operator, infallible Mike Shayne, caught like a pig under a barbed wire fence." He seemed to find it an irresistably hilarious situation.

"Oh, shut up, Rourke," Gentry told him. "Mike won't be up there forever, and when he gets down I wouldn't blame him if he unscrewed your head and threw it away."

"Come on and get me out of here, Will," Shayne said.

"I almost wish I didn't have to," Gentry said. "By rights I ought to leave you hanging up there till you learned good sense. The reason I can't is that, when they cut you loose, I've got to book you, Mike. This time you're in too deep."

"I don't see that," Shayne said. "There's a law against having a rotten fire escape but not against falling through one."

Gentry shook his head. "No use Mike. This fellow here—he pointed to a quiet watchful man in a dark flannel suit and soft brimmed felt hat—is straight from Washington, D.C. A country boy like me can't argue with Mr. Whiskers. If I don't hold you, you'll be taken up to the F.B.I. building on the Boulevard."

"Even if he's the President himself," Shayne pointed out, "he's got to respect a habeus corpus. Tell him I won't sit still for any thumb screws while this town's full of lawyers that owe me a favor."

"We don't use thumb screws, Mr. Shayne," the Washington man said. "At least the F.B.I. doesn't."

"What have you really got on me?" Shayne asked reasonably.

At that point the hacksaw finally cut loose the rusted and broken iron tread. Helpful hands assisted Shayne to get down to the alley itself. Nobody made any effort to put handcuffs on him, but a hasty search revealed the gun he was wearing.

"He has a permit for that," Gentry explained. "Now just what do you have on him, Carty?"

Carty was the detective lieutenant who had headed the original raiding party. He lowered his voice so only Shayne, the Chief and the stranger could hear all he said.

"Too much to let him go," he

told them. "He was seen with a woman leaving the scene of a murder and—"

"With a woman!" Gentry yelled. "What woman?" Where is she? You fools let her get away! Find her. She can't have gone far."

For some reason Tim Rourke who had edged his way up to the group, found this highly amusing.

"Find the woman," he said between bursts of laughter. "Cherchez la filly. Good old stuck-in-the-fence Mike! You can trust him to find a woman even on a broken fire escape!"

"Who was she, Mr. Shayne?" the government man asked quietly.

Shayne devoutly hoped Lolita was well out of the area by now. Police were fanning out in all directions. "Who was who?" he asked politely. "What woman? I don't know what you're talking about."

"We'll see," the quiet man said. He didn't raise his voice, but it was a threat.

"This is no place to talk," Gentry said decisively. "We'll all go up to my office where we can at least be comfortable."

VI

IN WILL GENTRY'S comfortable, cypress-panelled office in the new Headquarters building Mike Shayne knew he had to do some fast talking and even faster thinking. In spite of continued chuckles from the tipsy Tim Rourke, who insisted on being present, his situation was not in the least amusing.

The government agent was quietly and grimly confident. Gentry and Maine, and to a lesser degree Carty, were all Shayne's friends, and all unable to hide the fact that they were worried. Shayne made himself look calm and at ease while he lighted one of Gentry's long cigars.

"Mr. Shayne," the agent said, "let's hear your side of this matter." He sounded as if he was trying to be fair and impartial.

Shayne wasn't taken in.

"First," he said, "let's hear all of your side. I need to know what's going against me. You were there, so you tell it, and Carty can help out if you need him. I'll ask questions and answer yours. I've got nothing to hide."

"This is Mr. Wheeler, Mike," Gentry introduced him. "His credentials come from very high up in Washington, though they don't say who he worked for. He hasn't said either."

"At the moment it isn't important," Wheeler said. "Now as to the case for holding you, Shayne. It's very strong. First, you were seen leaving the scene of a murder."

"You were there," Shayne said. "Did you see my face clearly enough to recognize again? Did you see it at all?"

"I admit your back was to us, but your build is unmistakable, particularly in view of the fact you were on

the fire escape not three minutes later."

"My lawyers could make that statement look silly," Shayne said. "I admit I was on the fire escape, no more."

"We know you were hired by private parties to locate the murdered man."

"Was I hired to kill him too?"

"Were you, Mr. Shayne? That's something a grand jury will want to ask you. We know a man of your description contacted this fellow early in the day. We know you were on the premises where he was killed. The presumption is that you had both motive and opportunity to shoot him."

"Was he shot, Will?" Shayne asked Gentry. He was too old a hand to let on he already knew the man hadn't been. It would have proved he'd been inside the murder room.

Gentry passed the question to Carty, who'd been the first man through the door.

"No, not shot," the lieutenant said. His throat was cut, and there were stab wounds in his chest. The coroner can tell you better, but I think that's all."

"You see," Shayne said. "You've known me for years, Will. You too, Tim. When did I ever cut a man to death."

"Never," Will Gentry said. "Never. This isn't a knife man, Mr. Wheeler."

"He could have counted on that to throw you off the scent, Chief," Wheeler said. "Or maybe the woman actually did the killing. He doesn't tell us who she is or where to find her."

"You say there was a woman," Shayne replied. "I don't. It's up to you to produce her. You can't actually place me any closer to the corpse than that fire escape. That's no case, and you know it."

"The room's being dusted for prints," Lieutenant Maine said.

"Good. I want you to dust every inch of it. That way you'll know my prints aren't there anywhere."

Shayne was confident they wouldn't find his prints. He'd handled only the dead man's clothing, which wouldn't hold a print, and the suitcase which Lolita had taken with her. He'd flipped the light switch with the side of one finger and used a handkerchief to protect his fingers when he closed the door on going out.

Tim Rourke had stopped laughing now and was looking a good deal more sober.

"This is ridiculous," he said. "I don't know who you are, Wheeler, but I've known Mike Shayne for years. He wouldn't murder anyone for pay, and if he had to kill, he wouldn't use a knife. If he says he didn't cut that fellow's throat, then he didn't. I know it and so does Chief Gentry. Unless you can come up with a better case than you have so far, you'd better admit it too."

"The way the courts are set up," Gentry said, "I've got to agree

with Tim. I know Mike Shayne well myself. He's not always conventional and times he cuts the thin edge of the law mighty close; but I'd stake my reputation he wouldn't kill for hire. I can't book him on what you have so far."

The phone on his big desk rang, and he picked it out of the cradle. There was a silencer attachment on the mouthpiece of the instrument so his own words couldn't be overheard.

Wheeler sat perfectly still and expressionless. Whatever his other abilities might be he had a fine poker-face. Finally he took out a pipe and lit it.

"There's something to what you say, Shayne," he admitted. "There's no law against your being on a fire escape. You can take it as fact that my people are going to be right behind you from now on though. One step out of line and we'll take you before a Federal grand jury — that is of course unless you want to make it easier on yourself by cooperating and answering some questions for me."

"I've never refused to cooperate," Shayne told him. "Ask any questions you like and I'll answer them if I can."

"We'll try then," Wheeler said. "Had you ever seen the dead man before?"

"What dead man? I saw no dead man at all."

"I mean," Wheeler said slowly, "a man with a half of one ear missing who called himself Jose Ramos."

"Put that way," Shayne said, "the answer is yes. I saw such a man on two separate occasions. The first was in the restaurant kitchen the night of the shooting. The other time" — he looked at his watch — "was yesterday morning in the Hotel X."

"There was a woman with him the second time?"

"Just a three dollar fancy girl," Shayne said. "I had no business and no interest in her. What I wanted was information from him."

"Do you mean a confession to the restaurant shooting?"

"Not at all. My clients don't care a dime's worth who pulled the trigger. I wanted to know who ordered it done, but he couldn't or wouldn't give me an answer. That's what you really want too, isn't it, Wheeler?"

"More or less, yes," Wheeler said. "Have you found out yet?"

"No," Shayne said, "I haven't found out yet. I think I know how I can, though, if you let me alone to finish the job."

Chief Gentry put down the phone. "Something here you both should know," he said in his deep voice. "That was the Chief in North Miami. About fifteen minutes ago somebody bombed a luxury home in Keystone Point."

"El Grande!" Shayne said.

"That's right, Mike. The place was owned and occupied by Guillermo Marcos, otherwise known as

El Grande." Gentry turned to Wheeler. "He runs the biggest Havana Bank in the area."

"He knows that, Will," Shayne said. "What happened to him? Is he dead? Did they get him?"

"Apparently not," Gentry said. "He seems to have been home, but he was lucky. The first bomb — there were two separate explosions — was a bundle of dynamite sticks. It was thrown onto his step, and blew the front door to splinters. Then a plastic explosive bomb was thrown into the house through the doorway. This was a big one. It went off in the living room and just about wrecked the house. Part of the roof is gone and what's left of the place is on fire and out of control."

"One of Marcos' bodyguards — he called him a secretary — was inside when it blew. All they found of him was one foot and some blood. There was a cook in the servant's quarters. She ran for her life, and since she sleeps in the raw and weighs three-ten, that must have been a sight for the jaybirds."

"Okay, okay," Shayne said. "Save the laughs for later. How did El Grande escape? Did they tell you?"

"They told me. It was just plain bull luck as far as he was concerned. He'd stepped out on his back patio for a breath of fresh air before going to bed. When he heard the dynamite let go he ran for the motor cruiser he keeps at his private dock. He didn't wait for his man or anything else, but just cast off the lines. The shock wave from the second blast pushed the boat away from the dock and none of the flying debris hit him."

"When the police patrol car arrived he was drifting two hundred yards down the canal, scared white and trying to start the motor with the ignition key not even in its lock. So far he claims he hasn't an enemy in the world or an idea who'd want him dead."

"From what I hear around town," Rourke said, "it could be anyone he'd ever met."

"What about the bombers?" Wheeler asked.

"Clean gone without a trace," Gentry said. "They must have lit out right after the blast. One neighbor claims to have heard a car burn rubber out of that street, but he was still too shaken up by the blast to run out and look after it."

Wheeler turned on Mike Shayne. "All right, private operator," he said. "What does this do to the theories I'm sure you had worked out about this whole business? What does it tell you?"

"Quite a few things," Shayne said. "First it tells me the bombing was a phony. Whoever threw the thunder sticks didn't want Marcos dead at all."

"He took a funny way to prove it."

"If you were a cop, you'd know better than that," Shayne snapped at the man. "Any two contract men would have bombed front and back of the place, or kept a third bundle for the boat. El Grande would have been pulp before he got ten feet. This crew leave a driver in their car and don't watch the back door at all. Whoever it was just wanted it to look like El Grande was the target."

"But why —"

For plenty of possible reasons. Like I said, if you were a cop instead of just a cloak and dagger hero, you could think of a few for yourself."

"It smells all right," Lieutenant Maine said reflectively. "A character like Marcos doesn't just step out in the backyard for any breath of air. There's too much chance of somebody being hunkered down across the canal waiting to bushwhack him with a high powered rifle. Nobody gets in the place where Marcos is now without learning all the fine points of being careful."

Shayne took this moment to drop his own bombshell.

"I think I've got the answer," he said. "Things are falling in line. But I need just a few more facts. Will, I want you to set up a meeting around noon tomorrow for a list of people whose names I'll give you. If all goes as I expect I'll be able to hand you the killer then and solve Mr. Wheeler's real problem at the same time."

"If you think you know, tell us now," Wheeler said.

"I didn't say I could prove what I know," Shayne corrected him. "By noon tomorrow I think I'll be able to. Besides what I need right now is some sleep. That is — unless Mr. Wheeler here still thinks you ought to book me for murder."

VII

WILL GENTRY sent Mike Shayne to his apartment hotel in a police car. He wanted to assign the big

redhead a guard, but Shayne absolutely refused to consider the idea. He insisted he could take care of himself and needed the freedom to make certain contacts without interference.

Late as it was, Shayne made some phone calls from his apartment. One was to Senator Garcia and another to Will Gentry, who was sleeping that night in the special emergency quarters he maintained in the Headquarters building. Three were to New Orleans. He also called Tim Rourke and asked him to find out where Lolita was hiding. After that he turned in and slept until eight the next morning.

Because the meeting of the day would be basically unofficial, and because the news media as such weren't wanted, it had been decided to hold the session in Shayne's own office. To take care of the number expected Lucy Hamilton arranged to borrow a half dozen extra chairs from the hotel across the street.

Wheeler and Gentry were the first to arrive. The Washington man gave Lucy Hamilton an appreciative smile and drew the private detective aside.

"I've made some inquiries about you," he said. "Right now I'm inclined to believe you didn't actually kill anybody."

"I didn't," Shayne said

"I hope you got the proof you needed during the night?" Wheeler made it a question.

"I'm ready for this meeting, if that's what you mean," Shayne said. Actually he was still playing a hunch. While he was sure in his own mind about the killings, he was still relying on bluff or threat to get a confession.

"The detective's best ally is always the man he's looking for," he had told Lucy earlier that day. "A man who's trying too hard to hide something will always make mistakes."

"I hope this isn't the exception to prove the rule, Michael. What happens to you in that case?" his secretary said.

Shayne had shrugged. "Nothing much, Angel, except of course I get to look like a fool. I don't think anbody seriously accuses me of killing Rameaux. If they did I've Lolita for an alibi witness. Of course if I come close the guilty parties will be scared." He didn't have to add they might decide to eliminate him as a result.

El Grande arrived in a North Miami police car, accompanied by the Chief and by one of his own lawyers. He wasn't under arrest, but had insisted on immediate police protection.

Cap Flanagan was next to show. He had two lawyers — one black and one white — and greeted Shayne with a multi-faceted smile. Betty Jane Ramirez brought Billy Tom Dancer instead of an attorney. She wore a sheath-type mini dress. Within seconds after she'd greeted

Shayne, she and Lucy Hamilton were covertly appraising each other.

Lieutenant Maine brought in a sullen and silent Frenchy LaBorde. The New Orleans gangster had been given his choice between coming voluntarily or being picked up for questioning on "suspicion of vagrancy" and brought along against his will. He was allowed a phone call that brought a rather flustered local attorney to advise him.

A surprise arrival was a clerk from the Swiss consulate "to protect the interest of the Cuban government" as observer. Wheeler had probably arranged for this one.

Tim Rourke came in and took a chair in the rear of the office. No other press or media representatives had been invited or would be passed in by the uniformed men in the hall.

Last to arrive was Isabel Garcia. She came attended by two of her father's followers — an elderly man with "former Colonel" stamped all over him, and a handsome young fellow in an expensive Italian silk suit. True to her grandfather's sense of proper protocol, the older man was introduced as official spokesman for the delegation. Shayne had no doubt who would actually do the talking and thinking.

"I think that's everybody you wanted, Mike," Will Gentry said. "We might as well get down to business."

"I'm ready if you are," Shayne said. He pulled his massive frame erect in the oversized swivel chair back of the desk in the big front office. Lucy and a police court reporter prepared to take notes of everything said from this point on.

"We all know why we're here," Shayne told them. "Still I'd like to summarize briefly before going on to some answers. Basically we've got two problems. First is the matter of the raids that have driven our Havana Banks to the wall. Since the Banks are illegal, Chief Gentry can't take any official action about this situation. Since there are international complications, it can't be handled the way you would a run of the mine past-posting racket set up by locals. That's why Mr. Wheeler is here unofficially from Washington."

He paused, and looked at the three Havana operators in turn. "There's only one answer. I know it and you know it too. You've got to pay off on something other than the official Havana Bank clearing figures. It's not important whether you pick a figure released in this country or throw the balls like a standard Bolita game. Either you pay off on something that can't be fixed, or you're bled white from now on. You won't only save yourselves by it. You'll also cut off a stream of your own dollars that's been drained off to buy arms that could be used against this city and your country."

Isabel Garcia spoke up when Shayne paused. "Our exile groups

will help swing your Cuban born customers to accept whatever new figures you decide on. Just let us know what you're going to do."

Shayne never could tell how much her offer of help influenced them. His own last statement had been practical rather than patriotic, and designed to calm down the enigmatic Mr. Wheeler. Once the idea had been planted he moved on.

"Now this is the part the police can take action about. A man was shot and killed in a restaurant close to this office. Chief Gentry and I were there when it happened. This can't be treated as a gang or personal revenge killing. The man was very probably one of the educated betting ring cleaning out Havana Houses. We know he was also a secret agent of the Cuban Communist Government. That murder has to be solved."

"Last night the assassin who killed the agent, Blanco, was himself killed by knife wounds in a slum tenement. He died because someone was afraid he'd point out the man who arranged for the first killing. No fingerprints or clues were left by his executioners, but they were right all the same. His death, when and how it took place, points directly to the man we want."

"All of you here today are suspects in the killings. The motives are different, but each of you can be shown to have had a motive and an opportunity and those are the two thing a state's attorney needs to ask for an indictment. Believe me — anyone of you could be put on trial."

He paused and looked around at a solid circle of impassive poker faces. At first nobody moved at all.

The older man with Isabel Garcia broke the silence. "This is an outrage," he said. "Senator Garcia is a man of probity, of honor. It's preposterous that such a man would order an assassination."

"Don't be too sure about that," Shayne said curtly. "Senator Garcia is also head of an army at war, and of a revolutionary faction determined to win or die. Peacetime scruples may well be a luxury he no longer feels he can afford."

"You don't seriously accuse us?" Isabel Garcia demanded. "It's unthinkable. Besides, look at all the money we're paying you to find the killer. If we were guilty of anything we'd hardly bring a man with your reputation for getting results into the affair."

"Not," Shayne said, "unless you were sure I wouldn't find the right answer. Not unless you figured hiring me would tend to put you in the clear. Remember, you've been the major source of information on the Castro organization. You seem to know everything they do or plan as fast as they do. You would have known who Alcide Blanco was. It might have seemed like a wonderful chance to get his crowd mixed up with Mr. Wheeler's people and at the same time cut off the dollar in-

come from his government. You could have hired the killing done. Maybe you did."

He took the dead stub of the cigar out of his mouth and tossed it into his waste basket. Then he lit another.

"Fortunately," Shayne said. "We know who actually shot Blanco. Chief Gentry and I were there when it happened and saw him before he escaped. Later on I talked to him and he admitted the shooting freely and openly. He told me he was just a hired gun and working on his boss' order."

"The bum was lying," LaBorde yelled, getting to his feet.

His lawyer pulled him back into the chair. "Be quiet," the lawyer said.

"He claimed to be in Mr. LaBorde's regular employ," Shayne said. "His job was to kill on contract."

LaBorde couldn't stand it. "Lies! All lies! He never told you that because it ain't true. And I never said he worked for me. I said I got a notch-eared boy works for me sometimes, but it ain't this Jose Whoozis. My boy's name is Jesus Bruno. I can bring him in and prove it."

Tim Rourke opened his eyes and sat up.

"I suppose they're trimming his ear back in New Orleans right now," he said, "just so you won't be made out a liar." He laughed at his own joke.

Frenchy LaBorde wasn't laughing.

"You're a big-mouth bum," he told Tim Rourke. "I don't hire no contract men. I'm a perfectly legit smuggler. That's all."

"He said he was your man," Shayne reminded him. "He said you were paid to send him to kill Blanco. Why do you suppose he'd lie to me? He was just as guilty of murder, even if he did kill on order. Wasn't he?"

This time LaBorde's lawyer answered. "My client refuses to answer any more questions on the grounds that the answers might tend to incriminate him."

"This isn't a formal hearing," Shayne said. "When I want an answer I'll take him in the back room and beat it out of him."

He swung around to face Cap Flanagan and Betty Jane. "Either of you could have paid for the killing of Blanco. His crowd had you both on the ropes with their bets. In a little while your Havana Banks would be out of business and you both broke, unless the betting was stopped somehow."

"Now, Mike," Betty Jane said without showing anger or any emotion whatever, "that's not fair and you know it. Neither Cap nor I are stupid enough to order that killing. It would put us right between the Castro people here and Mr. Wheeler's crowd. Between the two of them we'd get off easy if we just got killed."

"You know that's true, Mr. Shayne." Cap Flanagan backed her play.

"It could be true," Shayne said. "I hope it is, because I like you both. On the other hand you could be counting on just that sort of logic to keep you in the clear.

"We've got to remember," Shayne went on, "there's nothing simple about this case at all. Each of you stands to gain by it as well as lose. If you could scare off the Cubans by killing Blanco and at the same time eliminate a competitor by putting the blame on him, that would be a horse of another color. You two could figure easy there was a natural suspect right at hand."

"That would be me, wouldn't it?" The question was from El Grande. "Because I'm a bigger success than them they gang up to frame me. I got all the reasons not to pull a killing that they have, shamus. Actually I got more because I got more money to risk. On top of that, the real guilty party tried to kill me too."

"Oh don't be a damn fool, Marcos," Shayne said. "That bombing at your place was phony. I know it as well as you do. A bunch of high school kids who really wanted you dead could have done better. It's just the sort of stupid trick you'd pull to cover up your own tracks."

"Stupid?" Marcos said. "El Grande's not stupid. I'll get you when this is over. I'll — "

"You won't do anything," Shayne said. "Look at the temper he's showing, Mr. Wheeler. There sits a man who could order the killing of anybody making a fool of him the way Blanco was. He'd lose his head out of dumb pride, even if it hadn't been costing him so much money. Cap Flanagan and Mrs. Ramirez are rational business people. This one isn't. He's a mad dog — the one mad, kill crazy dog we've got so far."

"Are you saying he's the one, Mike?" Gentry said. "Do you want us to bust him now?"

"You're ahead of me, Will," Shayne said. "I want to show he

could have been the man we want. Just as any one of them could. Even Wheeler here, if his bosses thought Blanco was a real danger."

"I won't dignify that with an answer," Wheeler said, pipe still between his teeth.

"Of course you won't," Shayne said. "Don't try to sell the idea short though. Governments have been known to eliminate people who bother them before this."

"Not when they didn't want more trouble with that agent's home nation. Grant me that, Mr. Shayne."

"Get back to Marcos," Gentry said. "He looks like a good bet to me."

"You're framing me," El Grande yelled. "I call you all to witness. All of you."

"You had the motive, the opportunity and the mean disposition to order a killing," Gentry rumbled in his deep voice. "My boys will prove any contact you had with LaBorde. Then we have you."

"Leave me out of this," Frenchy LaBorde protested. "I had nothing to do with it. Nothing at all. You think I'm crazy or something? I wouldn't kill my own man — which I ain't admitting he was — just to cover up for a customer."

"No," Shayne said, "I don't really think you would."

Tim Rourke got up and shuffled his cadaverous frame over to the filing cabinet where Lucy kept Shayne's liquor.

"Get on with it, Mike," he said. "It's getting on to the midday cocktail hour." He pulled out a partly empty fifth of scotch and took a drink from the bottle.

The lawyers present regarded him with obvious disapproval.

Shayne laughed at him. "Right to the heart of it, Tim. First things first. Okay then, I'll wind this up. It's funny though. I knew who the killer was before I figured out why he did it. Any one of these people had a motive. Any one could have hired Blanco dead — but only one was guilty. It had to be that one. So why him?

"We'd been thinking in limited frames of motivation. Blanco could have been killed to frighten off the Cuban betting men. It could have been done to get the Senator's group in bad with our Mr. Wheeler here, or to get the Castro people to kill a few of the Havana Bankers. It could have been the Bankers fighting among themselves and eliminate some of the competition, or to get us to arrest Marcos and get him out of the picture. We had too many motives."

Shayne got up, tugged his left earlobe, and walked back and forth in front of his desk. "The trouble was; we were thinking about motives for killing Blanco, and forgetting there'd been a second man killed. If we thought of Ramos' death at all it was just as a way to keep him from talking. Only one man here could possibly have had that motive. That was his boss."

"You're crazy," Frenchy LaBorde said. "You're lying. Kill my own man?"

"As long as it was a contract killing you hadn't any reason," Shayne said. "On the other hand you're the only one who could have set up that killing. Ramos was hiding out. He was smart enough to make sure nobody tailed him to that dump. The woman with him was soft on him. Nobody knew where they were but the killers. That's you and a couple of your boys. That's because sometime during the afternoon Ramos used the phone in the hall to check in with his boss — you. When he did, it was like committing suicide."

"You're forgetting I hadn't no motive. Ramos wouldn't put the finger on me even if I had ordered Blanco shot. He'd been sweated before without breaking."

"Sit down and shut up," Shayne ordered. "I talked to people in New Orleans by phone last night and today. You aren't popular there, Frenchy, but you are a success. You've made lots of money and you're looking for new ways to make more. You tried to get in the numbers racket there but the big operators were strong enough to keep you out. Then you heard about what Blanco was doing up here. It was your big chance to see the people here broke or fighting among themselves so you could step in. Killing Blanco was the catalyst to bring everything here to a boil.

Shayne, his eyes steadily on LaBorde, pulled matches from his pocket to light his dead cigar. He went on:

"Nobody ordered that killing but you, Frenchy. You figured when the smoke cleared you'd take over here, find a new basis for paying off, and make money. You had Ramos shoot Blanco. It was your bad luck that Will and I were there and saw him. I found him, but I was after his boss and let him go.

"A phone company record will show that he called you from here. You came on by plane to kill him for fear that he'd talk too much and you'd be called on to name a customer who never existed. While you were at it, you had El Grande bombed to scare him white and confuse the issue.

"You check that reasoning, Will, and it'll make sense. It's the only way all these things can be tied into one bundle."

"I'll buy that," Gentry said. To Lieutenant Maine: "Take him over to Headquarters and book him."

ANOTHER MIKE SHAYNE CAPER NEXT MONTH

by

PATRICK MEADOWS

BY A HAIR'S BREADTH

Only one man held the key to certain death. One man—and a tangled lock of human hair.

NOT COUNTING THE corridor lights by which the night watchman saw to the security of the building, there was only one window lighted.

In the frame of that window a man stood, hands clasped behind his back. He watched the parking lot. A car drove through the entrance and crossed the field, without regard for the diagonal lines

which marked parking slots. When the car halted at the main door of the building and the headlamps died, the man turned from the window. He glanced at the chemical journal open on his desk.

The title of the article in front of him was "The Classification and Identification of Synthetic Fibers." In smaller print, the author was identified as Richard Arnold.

The phone buzzed. He lifted it from the cradle immediately.

"Yes?"

"Dr. Lambert, there's a Richard Arnold to see you. Let him in?"

"Please, Leo. I've been expecting him."

Lambert set the phone down and took long steps to the door. When he had opened it, he returned to his desk and sat down. For the first time in longer than he could remember, he actually read the words painted on the frosted glass of the door: *Dr. Max Friedrich Lambert, M.D. — Dermatologist.*

It seemed too brief a summary of what he was. But it was accurate enough, and probably all that his patients wanted to know about him. As for Richard Arnold, who was not a patient, he would need to know something more.

Footsteps began at the elevator. They slowed twice as the walker checked numbers, then maintained a steady pace toward Lambert's office, the echoes becoming louder.

Arnold was standing in the doorway then, smiling. He was not much under six feet tall. His hair verged on being blond, and the eyes were very light brown. He stood firmly and erect as he spoke from the hall.

"Dr. Lambert, I presume?"

Lambert rose and smiled, not at the intended humor but at the man. "Come in, come in, Mr. Arnold." He reached, as though across the room, to shake hands. "Or should I say Dr. Arnold? You have just received your PhD, I believe."

He had thrown Arnold slightly off balance with the extended hand. Arnold hastened to meet the gesture, and regained his composure quickly. "Not Doctor Arnold yet, I'm afraid. I still have the formal rites to attend."

Lambert ended the handshake with a wrist movement indicating that his guest should take the chair opposite him.

They both sat down.

"Yes. The award ceremony is often harder to take than the winning of the prize, I fear." Lambert smiled again and offered a cigarette.

"Thanks." He took one and leaned over for the light.

Lambert had noticed that many people use the simple act of lighting a cigarette to punctuate phases of conversation. He looked expectantly at Arnold.

"I'm afraid I may be wasting your time," Arnold began.

"Nonsense. I have little else but time after my work is done. Besides, I've just read your article. It is an excellent piece of work —

quite elegant, in fact. I'm happy to have the opportunity to meet its author."

"Thank you. Such praise is always welcome." Arnold could not bring himself to say that the meeting might be wasting *his* time, "But I was refering to Lieutenant Bridges' reason for asking me to talk to you. Of course I am honored to meet *the* Dr. Lambert, but — ."

"Ah, Lieutenant Bridges. A dedicated man. I'm sure he wouldn't have asked you to come here if he had thought it would be a waste for either of us."

Lambert leafed slowly through the pages of the journal. "Your advanced understanding of your subject could be invaluable to criminal investigation, as I'm sure the lieutenant explained."

"If you don't mind, Dr. Lambert, I would rather like to get this over with so that we can both go home."

Lambert lifted his eyebrows a fraction of an inch, as though in surprise.

Arnold went on, at the same time impatient and anxious not to be downright rude.

"Lieutenant Bridges has asked me to act as consultant to the crime lab. He told me that I would be doing a service to the community. He told me that I would be paid well when my services were required. He used every conceivable approach. At this very moment, he wants assistance in a murder case in which a young woman is the chief suspect. I've told him, and you can tell him again for me, I'm not interested. I want no part of the business of bringing the guilty to justice; or, as sometimes is the case, the innocent to injustice."

Lambert waited for him to run down.

"I'm a chemist, not a criminologist. Let them use my work if they want to. I won't do it for them." With that, Arnold put out the cigarette, not yet half smoked.

Lambert remained at ease, waited for Arnold to resettle himself for the reply he expected. Then slowly, in a soft voice, he began talking. His tone was relaxed, but the pauses he made did not invite interruption.

"Years ago, when I was about your age, before I had begun to specialize, I had occasion to return to my home in Virginia. I think my father was ill at the time. While I was there, Gyp Reynolds returned from Europe. Neither of us had been back for some years, for different reasons.

"Now, I hadn't liked Gyp much in high school. Not many people did. He was arrogant and sharp-tongued. We always thought it was because his father was the wealthiest man in the county. We were wrong, I now believe. I came to know him somewhat better in the weeks that followed.

Lambert paused and lit another cigarette. He looked at Arnold's face as he passed the pack.

"I was having dinner at Harry Simmon's place. Harry did not go to college. By dint of natural intelligence and an eye for opportunity, he had become the chief of police. We had exchanged small talk about his work and mine, about events in our town since I had left. We had just begun our coffee and cognac when the phone range. Harry's wife Jill excused herself to answer it. She was back in a moment. Her face was white. Harry got up to take the phone, but she indicated that she had already hung up.

"'It's Gyp. His father's dead.' I think that's all she said, and at the time I wondered why she was so shaken."

Lambert shifted his position in his chair and knocked an ash into a silver ash tray. Reaching into a compartment under the desk, he removed a decanter and two glasses that clinked together as he set them down.

"Join me? There's no ice, I'm afraid." He poured half a tumbler of scotch into one glass and held the decanter at the lip of the other.

The young man shook his head. The look of resignation had gradually become one of interest.

Lambert swirled the liquid once in the glass and put it to his lips. When he had drunk, putting his head back, he lowered the glass, but his eyes continued to gaze at a point high on the wall.

He continued:

"On the way to the Reynolds house, it became clear why Jill had been upset.

"After I left home to go to medical school, I had little contact with those I had grown up with; I seldom returned, and then only for a brief visit with my parents. According to Harry, shortly after I left, Gyp and his father had one of those incredible family fights that it seems only the wealthy have. Perhaps it appears that way because it causes such a stir among those who are not well-to-do.

"In any case, apparently Gyp accused his father of killing Mrs. Reynolds by his treatment of her. He claimed that his father had never loved her, that he had wanted to own her as he owned the whole town before outside industry moved in. His father, in turn, called him the usual things: ungrateful, spoiled, indolent, not deserving the family name, and so forth. The altercation ended with a fist fight outside Reynolds' offices. Harry's predecessor broke up the fight and took both of them to his office.

That night, after some kind of financial agreement was made with a lawyer present, Gyp left town. He was gone seven years, and the person who mailed his monthly checks gave it out to friends that she had sent them to practically every capital in the world."

Lambert's eyes moved from the wall to Arnold's own. He saw at a glance that he was caught up in it now.

"Riding through the streets, peaceful as only small southern towns are, I wondered still why the great concern. Reynolds was an old man now, and his death of natural causes could not be a surprise.

"Then Harry told me of a letter in his files alleged by Mr. Reynolds to be from Gyp. It was a threatening letter some years old. Mr. Reynolds had also placed a sworn statement in Harry's hands stating that Gyp had telephoned him a number of times promising to kill him.

"When Gyp returned, Harry had remembered the old letters. He and Jill had discussed it. There was nothing he could do, of course. He and Jill were sure that the old man had written these out of senility and rancor. Moreover Gyp had only been in town two days, and Harry hadn't had time to talk to him about it.

"We found Gyp sitting with a cordial in front of the fireplace. Without speaking, he motioned us toward the dining room, where we found Mr. Reynolds crumpled on the floor. The table was set formally, and he was wearing a tuxedo. The red wine he had been drinking had turned over and stained the table cloth and the collar of his shirt. It took only a minute to determine provisionally what had killed him. Arsenic."

Taking his time now, Lambert put another cigarette into his mouth and lifted the lighter.

"I told Harry what I thought. He licked his lips and glanced toward the living room. He found it difficult to get the words out.

'That's what Reynolds said it would be'," he said finally.

"I looked at him incredulously. But the expression on his face told me he was serious. He sent me in to talk to Gyp. He wanted to look around before calling in anyone else.

"I had about ten minutes with Gyp before Harry came back. He carried a small phial. I sniffed it. It had contained arsenic. Harry said he found it in the bedside table in Gyp's room. While we were talking about this, Gyp did not once look up from the fire nor say a word.

"Harry told me that the county coroner was on the way. He had also called the officer on duty at the station, and he would be along

soon. Then he tried to talk to Gyp, and I went back to the dining room.

"Something Gyp had said in the few hopeless words he had uttered in my presence made me wonder. I was sure he would repeat it to Harry, so I didn't mention it myself. Gyp claimed that his father had actually feared he would poison him. But he had read somewhere that ancient rulers took arsenic in extremely small doses, hoping to give themselves immunity to the poisoning. Gyp felt that his father had panicked when he came home and had taken too much this time.

"I searched the sideboard and found a pair of scissors. Leaning over the body — his face was frozen in anguish — I snipped a lock of gray hair from the back of his head. No sooner had I placed the hair in an envelope and deposited in my pocket than the coroner arrived."

Lambert drained the last of his drink and reached for the bottle again. He poured less than a finger this time.

"After they had taken Gyp and his father away, I told Harry what I had done. He wanted to know why, but I answered that I would rather wait until I had run some tests. I asked him to hold things back as much as possible for Gyp until the next day.

"He was mystified, but agreed. He believed it impossible for Gyp to commit murder.

"By three o'clock the next afternoon I had my answer. When I arrived at the police station, Gyp had not even been charged. It took ten minutes to convince Harry that I had something. I thought I had evidence to support Gyp's story. He could be cleared at the coroner's inquest.

"At it turned out, it went a little further, to a preliminary hearing. But we had some assistance from a psychiatrist from a nearby city with whom Mr. Reynolds had been seeking help from time to time over the years.

Arnold waited for Lambert to finish. He wanted to see how he had done it, but he didn't, either because he refused to be baited or because he didn't want to break into the mood of the story.

"When I was in medical school, I had done some original research involving the excretion of certain organic compounds through the hair. I think no one has learned yet why this occurs. But it was proven by my experiments that some compounds ingested into the human body end up in the hair. I traced only four that definitely must be ingested to get there: lead, iron, silica — and arsenic.

"It takes quite a while for these compounds to get to the medulla of the hair, and that was the crux of the whole thing. There was an extraordinarily high arsenic count, and it couldn't have gone straight from the stomach to the man's head. He had been taking much more than the infinitesimal amount we all

obtain naturally, and for a long period of time."

Lambert reflected for a moment.

"He couldn't tolerate what had happened between him and his son He had gone to elaborate lengths to convince himself that Gyp was indeed a murderous scoundrel. This compulsive mixture of love and hate of his son killed him. That's my somewhat pedestrian analysis of it."

Lambert finished the story, peering speculatively at Richard Arnold, who was abstractedly looking at the journal lying on the desk. He fished absently for a cigarette, found none, and accepted one offered by Lambert. When he blew out the smoke, it was with the force of relief. With a sudden resolve he rose.

"Thank you, Dr. Lambert. I think we can both go now." He shook hands once more and walked toward the door. Half turning, he said, "If Lieutenant Bridges is expecting a call from you tonight, you can tell him I'll phone him in the morning." With a small salute and a ghost of a smile he stepped into the corridor.

Lambert was certain he had persuaded the young chemist. He drained his drink and washed the glass in the sink. He placed it back in the compartment. He stood with a small sigh and turned off the lamp behind his desk.

As he locked the door to his office, he had brief second thoughts, but quickly shook the feeling off.

No, he thought. It's better this way. If I had told him that there was not more than the normal trace of the element in that lock of hair, he would have certainly decided the other way. Idealism appeals to youth, not merely justice.

Read: In the MAY issue:

DEAD MAN'S HERITAGE

The New MIKE SHAYNE *Short Novel*

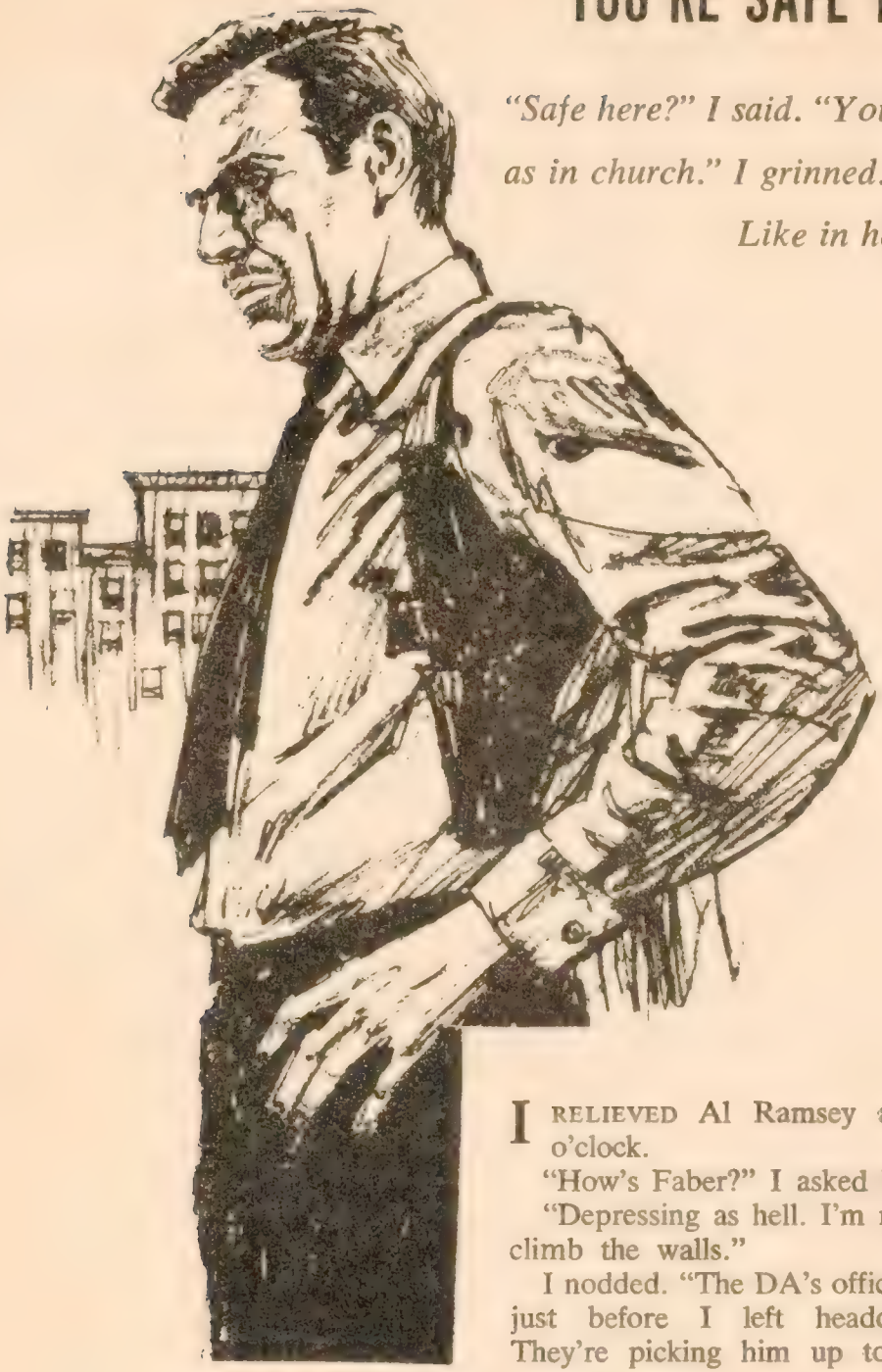
by BRETT HALLIDAY

In the next issue of this magazine it will be our pleasure to bring you one of the most unusual and gripping Mike Shayne novels in all our publishing history. For perhaps the first time the redhead, with his eyes wide, opens the door on a manhunt which even he believes must result in his own death. Don't fail to get this great new reading experience. You'll be glad we told you!

YOU'RE SAFE HERE

"Safe here?" I said. "Your safe as in church." I grinned. Safe? Like in hell . . .

by JACK FOXX



I RELIEVED Al Ramsey at eight o'clock.

"How's Faber?" I asked him.

"Depressing as hell. I'm ready to climb the walls."

I nodded. "The DA's office called just before I left headquarters. They're picking him up tomorrow morning at six."

"How come?"

"They figure it's safer to move him around," I said. "Santarin's trial is still three days off, and they don't want Faber settled in one place too long."

"Does that mean we'll be finished with it after tonight?"

"It looks that way. They didn't elaborate, but my guess is he'll be taken out of the city somewhere. The DA's men will handle it from here on in."

"Well, that's fine with me," Ramsey said. "I can think of other assignments I'd rather be on."

"That makes two of us."

Ramsey put on his hat and coat. He nodded to McGraw, the uniformed patrolman at the door, and McGraw let him out. When the double locks were in place again, and McGraw had sat down in his chair, I went along the short hallway into the living room. Faber was sitting on the modernistic fawn-colored couch, his hands flat on his thighs. He appeared to be trying to see past the drawn drapes over the window.

I tossed my coat on the writing desk set against one wall and walked over to him. "How's it going, Faber?"

He turned his head slightly to look at me, but he didn't reply. He was a little man, under five-six, and his bullet head was cross-hatched with thin, curving strands of yollewish-gray hair.

He looked pretty much like what he was: an underworld hanger-on and sometime police informant. He wore a pair of rumpled brown slacks and a soiled white shirt. There was a hopeless, resigned look in his pale eyes.

I loosened my tie and rested a hip on the arm of an easy chair. "You eaten yet?"

"No."

"Hungry?"

"No."

"Suit yourself." I lit a cigarette and put the match in a ceramic ashtray on the coffee table between us. "I think there's a deck of cards in the desk. How about a game of gin?"

"No."

"Come on," I said. "It'll take your mind off things."

He laughed, a short, humorless bark. "Take my mind off things. That's a good one. I'm a dead man, you know that? Santarin isn't going to let me testify. He'd sell his soul to keep me out of that courtroom."

"Don't be melodramatic, Faber," I said. "Santarin doesn't know you were a witness to Bannerman's murder, and he doesn't know you're scheduled to appear."

"He knows," Faber said. "Damn right he knows."

"Suppose he does? He can't have any idea where we're holding you, about this hotel here."

"You don't know Santarin. Not like I do. He'll find out, one way or another—if he hasn't already found out."

"It doesn't make any difference, can't you see that?" I said. "You're safe here. There's no way he can touch you. Besides, the DA is having you moved out tomorrow morning."

"He'll get to me," Faber said. "He'll find a way."

I stood up and punched out my cigarette in the ashtray. He was getting on my nerves. There was a table model television set in one corner of the room, and I went over there and put it on.

I fiddled with the channel selector until I found something to watch. Then I crossed to the writing desk. The coffee maker on its polished surface was half full; Ramsey had left it plugged in.

I said to Faber, "You want some coffee?"

He didn't answer. I shrugged, poured a cup for myself, and took it back to the easy chair. He was still sitting in the same position on the couch, staring fixedly at the draped window.

I watched two programs on the television, a western and a variety show. At eleven o'clock, I switched it off. From his position at the door, McGraw called, "Can I have some coffee, Lieutenant?"

I said I didn't see why not. I made a cup and took it in to him. He accepted it gratefully. "What time is it getting to be?" he asked.

"Eleven."

He gave me a rueful smile. "It's going to be a long night."

"Yeah," I said. "A damned long night."

When I returned to the living room, Faber was pacing back and forth in front of the draped window. His thin face was beaded with perspiration, and had an unhealthy yellowish cast to it.

"It's hot in here," he said. "Can't you open a window?"

"You know better than that."

"Listen, just open the one behind those drapes. What would that hurt?"

"I can't do it."

"Then have a fan or something sent up, will you? I'm sweating like a pig."

"I can't do that, either," I said. "The only thing I'm authorized to have sent up here is food."

His jaw began to tremble. He sank onto the couch again.

"I should have known better," he said in a whining voice. "I should have kept my mouth shut about what I saw that night. Then I wouldn't be here in this oven, waiting, just waiting for Santarin to make his move."

"That's enough, Faber," I said quietly. "I don't want to hear any more about Santarin. Do you understand that?"

He lapsed into silence.

Shortly before midnight, I finished the last of the coffee. I took the maker into the bathroom and ran some water into it from the basin tap. When I came out, Faber was up and pacing in front of the

drapes again. I put some fresh coffee into the maker. He was still pacing. "Sit down, will you?" I said. "You're making me nervous."

"I can't take much more of this," Faber said.

"And I can't take much more of you. Sit down and shut up."

He took a crusted linen handkerchief from the pocket of his slacks and rubbed his throat and neck with it. "I tell you, I'm suffocating in here!"

"Go in and take a cold shower," I said. "Or at least stick your head under the tap. Maybe that'll help."

"All right, then." He went into the bathroom.

I plugged the coffeemaker in, set the dial, and crossed to the easy chair. Through the open door I could see Faber leaning over the basin, washing his face and neck with cold water.

Suddenly, there was a sharp slapping sound. Faber seemed to jerk upright; then, almost immediately, he began to topple sideways.

I was off my chair and yelling to McGraw before Faber hit the tile floor. I had my service revolver in my right hand as I went through the bathroom doorway. Faber was dead; I knew that instantly. There was blood on his left temple, and his eyes were open wide with shock.

McGraw came running in, his own gun unsheathed. "What is it? What happened?"

I was looking around the small area. "Damn!" I breathed.

He followed my eyes. The opaque-glassed bathroom window stood wide open; traffic sounds filtered up vaguely from the street nine stories below. I grabbed McGraw's arm and pulled him out of there, into the living room.

He said, "How—"

"That damned fool Faber must have shoved it up," I said tightly. "He was complaining about the heat in here."

McGraw's face was white. "High-powered rifle, Lieutenant?"

"What else?"

"Santarin must have known where we had Faber all along," McGraw said. "He must have had one of his men planted in a building across the avenue." A touch of awe came into his voice. "Maybe he had a half dozen men planted in the area, all of them just waiting for some kind of opportunity."

"Yeah," I said grimly. I went to the phone. "I'll call headquarters. You get in and close that window. Be careful."

"Yes, sir."

I watched him edge into the bathroom, and then I lifted the receiver and began to dial. Santarin hadn't had a half dozen men in the area; he had had only the one. And all that one had been waiting for was midnight—and for me to open the bathroom window the way I had done when I went in there to fill the coffeemaker.

Every man has his price, even a police lieutenant.

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SNAPSHOT OF A GUNMAN

A NEW, EXCITING NOVELET

Death was dealing me some marked cards, and the one I drew was called Murder, as I followed an assignment only a fool would take — a trip to my own funeral!

by RONALD FIELDMAN

I STEPPED INTO Gene Hunter's office, wondering what was up.

He was the boss, sole owner of the Hunter Detective Agency, and I rarely saw him because I was a second string man and not high enough up in the echelon to rate a case of my own yet.

In a chair to one side of his desk sat a tall brunette, her thin, intense black hair worn in a French twist. She had a figure like an hourglass, with sand in all the right places, yet she didn't look quite beautiful. Her head hung slightly even as she looked up at me with red-rimmed eyes, and she paid no attention to a stray wisp of hair that drooped across one temple. I frowned at Hunter as I sat down.

"Vern, this is Mrs. Nora Pillino," he said; "Mrs. Pillino, Vern Cross.

She says you know her husband."

It took me a minute to place the name.

"Frank Pillino?" I asked. She nodded, twisting the straps of the purse in her lap with the fingers of both hands. I said to Hunter, "Yeah. He's one of the bartenders at Ginetti's. I stop there sometimes on the way home."

"He's missing," Hunter said, turning to her. "Tell him what you told me, Mrs. Pillino."

She heaved a sigh before she spoke.

"Mr. Cross, how well do you know my husband?" she asked.

"Not very well, really," I said.

"I thought you knew him, that's why I came here." She had trouble keeping her voice from breaking. "Didn't you send him a get well card when he was in the hospital two months ago?"

I admitted sending the card. Frank Pillino was in for a minor hernia operation at the time and I'd gone through the same thing myself, so I sent him a card. He was a good bartender and we got along well whenever I stopped in. I told her as much.

"He didn't come home Wednesday night, Mr. Cross." This was Friday. "He's usually home by three-thirty, and when he still hadn't come home this morning I came here." She opened her purse and handed me a photograph. "And then there's this picture."

It was a black and white snapshot of a man with a gun, neatly framed. He was partially turned from the camera and only three-quarters of his face was visible. Who ever it was, he was good looking in a brutal sort of way, and dressed in a turtle-neck sweater and a sport coat. Off to one side was a blurr of white in the background.

"Frank took that the other night," she said.

"When?" I asked. I knew nothing of Frank's background or home life.

"Tuesday night." She took out a Winston and I held a light for her. The cigarette danced nervously in the pencil flame from my lighter for a moment before it caught. "He told me before he left for work Tuesday that he'd be late getting home. He said he was going up to the boat docks at Gordon Park on Lake Erie after work. He wanted to take some pictures of the moon over the water from one of the piers."

"I didn't know Frank was a photography bug," I said.

"Oh, very much so," she said. "He even has half the garage converted into a darkroom." She took a deep drag on the cigarette, as if it could ease her worry. "Anyway, he didn't get in till early Wednesday morning, and then he spent the rest of the night in the darkroom. He slept all day, and then at supper, before he left for work, he showed me this picture."

She took another long pull on the cigarette, then crushed it out in an

ashtray, half smoked. "He said that he'd been on the pier taking time exposures when a man came out of a boat there and yelled something at him. He started to walk toward the man and this guy took a shot at him."

"Was Frank hit?" I asked.

"No. He said he ran back and got his camera and put a flash bulb in it. This man came at him and Frank snapped the picture in his face and blinded him. Then he ran for the car and came home."

"Didn't he call the police?" Hunter wanted to know.

"No," she told him, "Frank didn't want to bother. Wednesday he took the car to work and that's the last I've seen of him. I called the bar. Mr. Ginetti said Frank left at his regular time and that's all I've been able to find out. I called all his friends, but none of them have seen him."

"Do you know the man in the picture, Mrs. Pillino?" I asked her.

"No."

"Has Frank ever done this before — disappeared, I mean?"

"No," she sighed, staring into her lap now.

Hunter said, "I think you should take this up with the police, Mrs. Pillino. They should at least be notified."

"I — I can't, Mr. Hunter," she stammered.

"Why not?"

"Well, because I don't want to get Frank in trouble. You see, this may be nothing. I don't know. Frank may be all right. If the police start trying to find him they'll dig into his background and — and find things. I'm afraid that if they did find him they might arrest him."

Hunter didn't understand, but I did.

"Gene," I said, "Frank's a bookie relay at the bar. For a while there I think he was running numbers too, just to pick up a little on the side."

"Thank you, Mr. Cross," Nora Pillino said. "You put it so much better than I could."

I gave her a nod but I was staring at the picture again. "Is there any chance that Frank might know who this guy is and not have told you?"

"I don't see how," she said, twisting her purse straps in her fingers again.

Hunter asked her his favorite question. I'd heard he always asked it of a new client because its answer can reveal things that normally wouldn't come out.

"Let me ask you a hypothetical question, Mrs. Pillino," he said. "What would Frank do if he happened to come into a large sum of money suddenly?"

"Why do you ask that?" she said.

"It helps define people."

She thought a moment. "Well, I don't know. I suppose he'd buy his own bar. He's always wanted to have his own place so he could make more money. He'd like to

buy me nice things, I guess, but he's never been able to. Frank's never been much of a breadwinner. That's why we've never had any children."

There seemed to be a touch of bitterness in her voice and I wondered about it. Somehow I couldn't see her with children. Cadillacs and fur coats, maybe, but not a baby stroller and diapers.

She gave me a picture of Frank to show around and a list of his friends. I got a description of Frank's car, and, after Hunter discussed the fee with her, I gave her one of my cards with my home phone number on it and she left.

I turned to Hunter.

"Is this one mine?" I asked him.

"Yes," he said. "You know the guy and anyway it's time you went first string. You've been doing pretty good lately." First string meant I would be in charge of the case and the director of any other operatives I called on to help me.

"Thanks," I said.

"You want one of the company cars?"

"No. this looks like a one-man job. I shouldn't need the radio." All our company cars are equipped with two-way radio.

"Okay," he said. "Call in now and then and log your mileage." I said I would and left. A few minutes later I climbed into my Volkswagen and headed for Ginetti's.

On the way I tried to remember what I knew about Frank Pillino.

I had never discussed Frank's personal life with him. He was a nice guy to talk to, and knew enough about any subject to stay in a conversation with almost anyone. He made a great bartender; but bartenders don't make a great deal of money, and that brought my train of thought around to his wife. I knew next to nothing about her. Her remark about him not being much of a breadwinner bothered me, but it probably had nothing to do with the case, so I put it aside.

The human brain works in strange ways. I had been thinking about Frank Pillino and his disappearance off and on for nearly an hour. Memory traces that had been untapped for weeks and months were beginning to awaken. Gradually stray scraps of conversation long forgotten came back to me.

During the past four or five months almost every time I'd seen Frank the discussion had sooner or later turned to the fine points of my work. He told me many times that in his youth he had considered becoming a detective. He often asked me about "detecting" as he called it, and wanted to know how it was done. In the past few months I had practically given him a course in private investigation.

Another stray thought crossed my mind: Frank was pushing forty, but his wife could be no more than thirty-four. She didn't look that old but I'd studied her legs. A woman's

legs will tell you far more about her age than her face.

GINETTI'S BAR & Grill hadn't been open long when I stopped in; it was still early in the day. I ordered lunch and asked Leo Ginetti to join me. I didn't know Leo as well as I knew Frank but he knew who I was. When we were settled I asked him about Frank's last day. He couldn't tell me anything unusual so I showed him the snapshot.

"Ever seen that guy before, Mr. Ginetti?" I asked him.

He adjusted his steel-rimmed glasses with both hands and studied the picture for a while, then answered in his thick Italian accent. "He come in once'a while, Verni," he said, brushing a hand through his graying black hair, "only I donna think Frank know him."

"How about Charlie?" One of the other bartenders.

Leo Kinetti took the picture over to the bar. In a minute he came back with Charlie and they both sat down.

"Yeah, I know the bum," Charlie said. "He was in here Wednesday night. Talked to Frank for about five minutes, then he left."

"Who started the conversation?" I asked.

He thought a minute, then shook his head. "I didn't see that. The guy's a bum, that's all." Charlie called anybody he didn't like a bum, so I told him to elaborate. "He's mixed up in the rackets some way," he said. "Narcotics, I think. Claims he's got a way with women but he'd have to prove it to me. Name's George something. I don't know his last name. I think he drives a '69 Caddy, white one, but that's about all I know about him. I only talked to him a couple of times."

I thanked him and he got up and left. Leo gave me a couple of names of Frank's friends but I already had them on the list his wife had given me. He couldn't give me much more. He didn't know much about Frank's home life either. One thing he confirmed: Frank was out of the numbers game now, but he still took bets on the ponies.

I climbed in my Volkswagen and wasted the rest of the afternoon

finding and talking to Frank's friends. All I got was one who had the impression that Nora Pillino was a gold digger. Most of the rest didn't know enough to confirm that and I didn't want to talk to Frank's neighbors yet.

I found the bookie Frankie took bets for but he was no help either, so I drove up to Gordon Park, the wharf Frank was supposed to have taken the snapshot on.

The sun was painting the western cloud cover a dozen shades of orange when I got there. The floating steel piers jutted like wrinkled arthritic fingers out into the water, and the light from the setting sun glanced off the windows of boats and shanties, giving the place an eerie quality.

Mrs. Pillino hadn't known which one Frank had been on, so I began walking. The place was nearly vacant and no one questioned me as I walked to the end of each pier. Only a few of the boat owners were around, and fishing boats and cabin cruisers rocked quietly at their moorings like lonely, deserted women.

I was trying to find a place among the boat docks where a picture of the moon over the water of Lake Erie could be taken. The setting sun was my guide. It was in the zodiac, as was the moon, and I tried to line up a place for a photographer to set up his camera. There wasn't one: it couldn't be done. To the east the shore line was in the way and directly west of me a high, fenced off land bank jutted out and served as a parking area for a concrete public fishing pier.

From where I stood you couldn't even see any water looking west because the parking area was in the way. The shot could be taken from up on the fishing pier but there were no boats there, and it wasn't even within shouting distance of the boat docks. I wondered if she could be mistaken about the wharf Frank had said he'd been on.

I kept an eye out for bullet holes along the wharf because a gunman blinded by a flash bulb wouldn't necessarily stop shooting. No dice. I also tried hard to find something that could be a white blur in the picture but there were too many possibles. It could be a sign on a pole, part of a boat, a flaw in the negative; even a pigeon. Anything but a light. It is a photographic axiom that you can't take a picture of light with light.

Another thing: the snapshot was well framed. The odds against a hastily taken snapshot being well framed weren't hard to figure. If the camera was held normally the shot would be taken with the camera positioned somewhere within a ninety degree arc. Three of those degrees would produce the picture I had. Odds: thirty to one.

I didn't like it.

I showed Frank's picture and the snapshot to the few boat owners

and dock workers I could find, keeping my thumb over the gun in the picture each time. No dice. No one had seen either of them.

Something else was bothering me. If Frank was taking time shots just before he was shot at, how was it he had had time to change the lens to a flash setting so that the picture would come out at all?

Conclusion: Frank had lied to his wife about the snapshot. Or she had lied to me.

It was getting dark and I had drawn a blank, so I hit the road. I took Liberty Boulevard south to Superior Avenue, then turned left and headed for Nora Pillino's house. They lived in the southern part of East Cleveland and I was fairly certain she'd be at home, since Frank had the car. But she had her coat on when she answered my knock and appeared to be about to leave.

"Going out?" I asked her.

She was surprised to see me.

"Yes," she said. "I can't stand it around here with Frank gone. I thought I'd take a walk. What was it you wanted?" She didn't ask me if I'd found anything yet.

I want to look at Frank's darkroom."

"Why, whatever for?"

"I'm having trouble finding the spot where Frank was taking the time exposures from. If I could find the prints he made, or even the negatives, it would help.

"Oh," she said. "Well, all right. I'll get the key."

The garage was separate from the house and behind and to one side of it. Frank had used plywood and tarpaper to close off half of it into a separate room. It was light-tight and had a door in front where the old garage door had once been. Two of the walls were penetrated by complicated ventilators which kept air circulating without letting any light in.

She opened the door and turned the light on. I was impressed. Half of one end wall was taken up by a difusion enlarger and both of the side walls were lined with work tables, cupboards, and shelves. On the tables and shelves were all the paraphernalia an amateur photog could ever want: developing trays, graduates in various sizes, a thermometer, tongs, stirrers, two funnels, a spring timer, rollfilm tanks, a small contact printer, bottles of sodium thiosulfate, acetic acid, developing solutions and stop bath.

Next to one of the tables was a large wastebasket half full of cuttings, and in one corner was a small sink with a cold water faucet. Frank had spent quite a bit of money on this room and I asked her about it.

"Yes," she said, "over the years Frank has spent any mad money he had on the darkroom. It's his only vice and I don't mind." There was no bitterness in her voice now. She had forgiven him his sins.

"Did he neglect you to do it?" I asked.

She shrugged. "Not really."

I searched the room, opening cupboards and drawers. There were pictures and negatives of many subjects. Some of them were flattering portraits of her. She got a soft, faraway look in her eyes when she saw them again. Twenty minutes later I was through. I had looked at a lot of pictures. None of them showed the moon over the water.

She was checking her wristwatch by the time I finished. I thought maybe she'd made a mistake about the wharf Frank said he'd been on Tuesday night and I asked her about it. She couldn't help me. Frank had told her Gordon Park boat docks and that was all she knew, so I left.

At the end of her street I had to wait for a cab to turn in before I could pull out and head for home. It wasn't a long drive to my place, but all the way there I had trouble keeping my mind on the road. I liked Nora and I wanted to help her, but somehow I got the feeling that finding Frank wasn't the only kind of help she needed. She was a lovely woman, just now beginning to lose her youth; but inside her a lost little girl wandered, alone and afraid. The lost little girl appealed to my paternal instincts.

I made a quick supper and tried to watch some television. No dice. I turned it off and tried to think about Frank Pillino. My thoughts kept turning to Nora instead. Frank was swiftly becoming a nonentity in my mind.

Then I remembered the man in the snapshot: George. I had meant to ask her if Frank knew anyone by that name but it had slipped my mind. It gave me an excuse to call her and I dialed the number quickly. I let it ring for two minutes. No answer. It had been two hours since I'd seen her.

"I can't stand it around here with Frank gone. I thought I'd take a walk." Taxicab at the end of her street turning in when I left.

I went to bed early but I didn't get to sleep for an hour.

THREE O'CLOCK in the morning the phone rang. It was Nora and she was hysterical.

"Mr. Cross," she sobbed frantically, "it's Frank. He's dead — "

"What?" I said. I could barely understand her.

"At least I think he is," she wept. "Oh God, what am I going to do?"

I tried to calm her but I wasn't very calm myself.

"Now wait a minute," I said. "What happened?"

"The garage is on fire and I called the fire department and when I went out I saw Frank's car in the garage — " She tried to say something else but couldn't, and broke down crying instead. When she subsided a little I told her to hang on, I'd be right out there.

Two fire trucks, a fire car, and

three police cruisers were there when I arrived. They already had the fire out and had two spotlights illuminating the scene. The half of the garage that had been the darkroom was burned almost to the ground, and the roof of the other half had caved in on Frank's car. Only the outside wall next to the car was still standing.

Most of the police officers were there just to keep the crowd back. At least twenty onlookers were milling around, even though it was past three-thirty. One of the patrolmen asked me who I was and I told him I was a friend of the family. He said there was a badly burned body in what had been the darkroom, and told me I could go in the house, but to stay away from there. One of the coroner's men was on the way.

I went in to see Nora Pillino. She looked like she was still in shock, though she was sitting and talking to two police officers who were trying to be as gentle as they could. She saw me and got up and ran to me, throwing her arms around me and sobbing into my chest.

I didn't like that in front of the cops but she needed it, so I held her until she settled down again. Then I put her in a chair and asked her if she had a family doctor. She did and I called him.

When I finished on the phone I went over and sat on the arm of her chair. She had stopped crying and was staring at the floor.

"Did you tell them?" I asked her.

"Yes, all of it." she said, her voice a broken whisper.

One of the officers asked me who I was. I told him and showed him my I.D. He asked me a lot of other questions and it took a while to tell him what little I knew. I had to choose my words carefully because I didn't want to hurt Nora. She was still on the brink of hysteria.

He asked me for the snapshot of George but I hadn't brought it with me. I told him I'd bring it down to the headquarters building in the afternoon and got his name and badge number. He told me to leave it at the detective bureau, then asked Nora if she or Frank had known this George. She said she didn't and as far as she knew neither did Frank. The doctor showed up then. We left him alone with her and went outside.

I prowled around the debris of the burned out garage. They had already removed the body, but there was the stench of charred flesh in the air. It didn't look right. Or maybe I didn't want it to. I had the impression that the darkroom had been a mess before it caught fire. It had been very neat the one time I'd seen it, but it wasn't now. Developing trays, funnels, graduates and bottles were everywhere.

The floor of the place was littered with the charred remains of some of the drawers that looked like they

had been pulled out of the work tables. Maybe the water from the fire hoses had caused the mess, or maybe Frank had panicked trying to get out.

I walked around to the other half and tried to take a close look at the blackened shell of Frank's car. It had been pulled all the way in before the fire started and I leaned down to examine the rear end. What I thought I'd seen in the beams from the spotlights was there: a bullet hole in the right rear bumper guard.

"Hey, fella," a voice behind me said, "what are you doing?"

It was a burly character in a fireman's uniform. He chewed his cigar like he wanted to make sure he got his quarter's worth out of it. Already I didn't like him.

"Looking around," I said. "Who are you?"

He spat tobacco juice in a fine spray near my foot. "Fire marshal," he said.

"What do you think happened?" I asked him, going along with his act. I had seen the writing on his chest.

He shrugged. "Kind of hard to tell yet. Have to wait till daylight, get a better look." The writing said he was a deputy fire inspector.

"I can't wait to see the coroner's report," I said.

"Yeah." He chewed on his cigar, inspecting me.

I nodded over toward where the darkroom had been.

"Place is a mess," I said. "Think the water hoses did that?"

"Naw. Not all of it anyway. He messed it up some trying to get out."

"How do you figure it?" I was having a bad time trying to coax information out of him."

"He probably was tryin' to get out and the smoke got him." He had taken me for a cop as I'd intended. "Fire started in a wastebasket and spread fast, with the tar paper and all. Looks like he got the door open but didn't make it out."

"Where did they find the body?" I hoped he wouldn't realize that if I was a police detective I should already have known.

"By the door, almost. He was layin' facing it, on his stomach." He hooked his thumbs in his pants, grinned around the cigar and pointed it toward the house. "You see the woman?"

I nodded.

"Some looker, eh?"

"Yeah." I walked away from him because I couldn't stand him any more. Besides, the doctor was coming out of the house and I wanted to talk to him.

The doctor was middle-aged and walked with a limp, his bag banging against one knee with every other step. I caught up with him in the middle of the driveway and stopped him.

"How is she, Doctor?" I asked.

"She's sleeping now," he said. "I gave her some librium and a bar-

biturate. She'll be all right." He sighed. "It's a hard thing to take."

"Yeah,it is," I agreed. "Did you know Frank very well?"

"Fairly well, yes."

"Did you know much about his personal life, Doctor?"

He frowned at me. "Only a little. Why?"

"I'm a private detective, Doctor," I told him. "Frank's been missing since Wednesday night and I've been trying to find him."

"Oh?"

"Yes. I'd like to ask you a couple of questions, if you don't mind. They may seem pretty strange."

"All right."

"Do you happen to know if Frank and Nora were faithful to each other?" I could see that he didn't like the question.

"The Pillinos were one of the happiest married couples I know," he said a little too sternly. "Not like most people nowadays."

"That's not what I asked you, Doctor," I said gently. I hadn't meant to antagonize him but I did.

"There was no infidelity in the family so far as I know," he snapped.

"How about illnesses?"

"Nothing serious. Frank had a little high blood pressure, that's all."

"High blood pressure can cause a stroke under stress, can't it?"

"Yes," he admitted reluctantly. "What are you getting at?"

"Nothing, Doctor. But I'd like you to contact the coroner's office

and help get a positive identification of the body. It was badly burned and I doubt if there'll be any fingerprints left."

"All right. Is that all?"

"That's all," I said. "Thanks." He nodded and stamped away, the bag banging against his leg again.

He had given Nora a tranquilizer and a sleeping pill so I knew it would be no good trying to talk to her. I left and went home to get some more sleep.

SATURDAY AFTERNOON I called Gene Hunter and told him the whole story. He said Nora Pillino had called to get the bill for my work so I gave him my time and mileage. He said he'd see me Monday morning.

I took the snapshot of George

and climbed in my VW to go down to East Clevaland police headquarters, then changed my mind. Ginetti's Bar & Grill was closer and I needed to think the whole thing out over a drink anyway, so I headed there instead. Besides, there was something I wanted to ask Leo Ginetti. The snapshot could wait.

Leo wasn't there when I walked in and neither was Charlie, so I sat at the bar over a scotch and water and talked to no one.

Then I saw him, the man in the snapshot.

George.

I watched him get up and go over to the pay phone on the wall. He made a short call, then returned to the bar. I considered calling the police, though I couldn't see what good it would do. I was in Cleveland and I'd have to call the East Cleveland police because they were the ones who would want to talk to him.

They'd request Cleveland P.D. to pick him up, but that would take a while and I didn't know how much time I had. Besides, George was sitting too close to the phone and might hear me make the call. I doubted if he knew who I was, and I didn't want him to find out just yet.

He nursed his drink all the way to the bottom, then got up and left. I was right behind him.

He got into a white 1969 Cadillac convertible and headed north. When he got to St. Clair Avenue he turned right and stayed on it for almost an hour. For a while a blue '67 Ford station wagon hung on behind me and I though I was being followed as well, but it finally pulled out and passed. There were two tough looking characters in it and I could see fishing poles sticking out of the back.

I wished I could have gone with them, wherever they were going, instead of following a gunman whose last name I didn't even know, to a destination also unknown. But I had to know. I had smelled more than burnt flesh, wood and tarpaper at Frank Pillino's burned out darkroom. I had smelled a rat and I wanted to find him.

We were on Route 2 east of Euclid and headed for Painesville when he finally turned off. We followed secondary roads for twenty minutes, then he took a dirt road that entered a wooded, hilly area, so I stopped the car and killed the engine.

I rolled down the window and listened. Nothing.

I started the car again and drove down the dirt road about a hundred yards, then pulled off and parked behind some bushes. I got out, locked the car, and followed the road on foot, almost wishing I had a gun. Ohio law doesn't allow anyone except police officers to carry concealed weapons without a court order.

However most of us can handle ourselves within limits if the need arises. Some of us have made self-defense a hobby. Gene Hunter, for

example, once boxed Golden Gloves. Two of our best operatives have a background of judo. They have never, to my knowledge, had to use it while on the job. I hold a Green Belt in Karate; not an extremely high rating, but I don't have to worry walking down dark streets either.

The dirt road cut through a quarter mile of woods and gently rolling hills with no man-made structures in sight. Then it rounded a bend and I saw the cabin. It was set deftly into a hillside. In front of it was the white Cadillac. I watched for five minutes but there was no movement, so I started to circle to come up from one side.

I pushed slowly through bushes and clumps of trees. It was quiet here, seemingly deserted. Sparrows flitted from branch to branch and a robin crossed a knoll ahead of me, its cautious bouncing hop punctuating its path. I could smell water and checked the wind. The road probably ended at a pond.

I stopped a few yards away from the cabin and listened. No sound, only the birds. I wondered if George was waiting for someone. I wanted to go in but I forced myself to remember that he was the man with the gun. Somehow he was involved in Frank's death. I moved up to the side of the building to wait.

Finally I heard the front door open. Seconds passed. I heard someone spit, then the door closed again.

Silence.

I leaned around the edge of the building to look. And looked right into the muzzle of a thirty-eight.

"Come on in," he said. He was wearing a mask made from a handkerchief but even so I could see it wasn't George; and I realized I was dealing with professionals.

He took me inside and there was another one, also masked, and he wasn't George either. I wondered where they'd parked the blue '67 Ford with the fishing poles sticking out of the back.

They put me in the center of the room, one standing in front, one behind. Both had guns. An experienced Karate student can take a man with a gun if he gets close enough to leave an opening. But only a Black Belt would try to take two men with guns and neither of these would get close enough. They were professionals.

They wasted no words. They didn't want me to hear their voices too much. I could assume from this that they probably wouldn't kill me. Reinforcing this thought was the fact that they wore masks. If they were going to kill me they wouldn't care if I saw their faces.

The one in front of me motioned for me to take off my coat and throw it on the floor. I did and he stepped back when I threw it as I'd expected him to. They were taking no chances.

He leaned down and began to search it and as he did he motioned for me to turn around. I turned to my right, keeping my face expres-

sionless. I looked over my shoulder as I turned and saw that the one I was turning to was in range. The other one would still be searching my coat because they wanted the snapshot. He would find it about now and his attention would be fully distracted.

I had my right foot in position for proper balance and began to bring my left foot around just as I would in a normal turn. Immediately I smashed my left leg upward, screaming the *kiai* yell. His gun flew upward and bounced off the ceiling.

As my leg came down to the floor, again, bringing me forward, I followed it, throwing my right fist, center knuckle extended, toward his throat and drawing my left arm swiftly backward to twist my whole body into the blow. But he was quick too. He jumped backward as I moved and almost got out of my reach so that the jab had less than normal impact. Worse, he forced me to follow him in order to complete another blow, thus bringing me farther away from the one with my coat who was still armed.

I threw my right foot, edge on, into his solar plexus but he doubled up in advance, again lessening the blow. He was not trying to defend himself. His partner would take care of that, and when I realized what he was doing I turned to meet the other one.

Too late.

He hit me in the temple with his gun and I fell as he came at me again. Last conscious thought: my feeling that Frank's death was not entirely accidental had been confirmed.

I WOKE UP to a blurred whiteness, lying on my back, no idea where I was. I felt around. Pain everywhere. I was on a bed and afraid to find out where the bandages stopped and unbruised flesh began.

Then things came into better focus. A hospital room with one other bed, unoccupied. There was a cord with a button on the end under my hand and I pushed it. A nurse showed up and I tried to smile at her. No dice. The bastards had beaten me to a pulp afterwards, probably with their feet. I wondered if George had come from wherever he'd been hiding and helped them.

George.

There was no longer any doubt in my mind that he was behind this whole thing, and I promised myself that we would meet again, one fine day.

Gene Hunter walked in then. "How are you feeling?" he asked. It was Monday and his expression told me he wasn't too happy.

"I'd have my head examined if I could get it back on," I said. He didn't laugh. The hell with him.

"Okay, what happened?" I told him and when I finished he let out a string of cuss words. "Do I have to tell you what you did wrong?"

"No."

"What's the phone number of the East Cleveland police department?" He meant I should have called them from Ginetti's.

"I called them yesterday," I told him. "They have the whole story. I gave them the license number of the Cadillac but that set of plates was stolen Saturday morning. They are checking out the cabin now with the Geauga County sheriff's office, but I doubt if they'll find anything. It was a setup."

"And you walked into it."

Yeah." I didn't feel much like talking but there were things I had to know. "The coroner's office run the autopsy yet?"

"Yes, why?"

"What did they say?" I knew he would know. He would have checked to make sure the agency was in the clear.

He sighed. "Frank Pillino died in a fire accidentally set while working in his darkroom. The fire started in a wastebasket and the cause of death was smoke inhalation."

"Anything else?"

"There were some signs that he'd been in a fight or something a day or two before he died. There appeared to be bruises in the underlayers of flesh and muscle tissue, but it was hard to tell. What are you thinking, Vern?" He'd seen the expression on my face and didn't like it.

"Are they sure he was conscious when the fire started?" I asked.

He frowned at me. "Look, Vern, if you're thinking it wasn't an accident, forget it."

"Why was I beaten up?"

"Because you followed the wrong guy and he didn't like it," Hunter said. I muttered a dirty word. "Look, Vern, Nora Pillino has paid her bill and the police are satisfied that the fire was an accident. It's over, forget it. The case is closed. Officially."

"Except with me," I said.

"What does that mean?"

"It's personal."

"Vern, you do what you want on your own time; but if you get the agency involved you can start looking for another job," he said.

"I know."

He sighed again. "How long are you going to be in here?"

"The doctor said a week or ten days. I don't have any broken bones, just bruises." Like Frank Pillino.

He shook his head and left.

Tuesday I had a surprise. Nora Pillino walked in during the afternoon and waved hello.

"Hi," I answered her. "I didn't expect to see you here." She was dressed in black but she could smile again.

"How are you feeling?" she asked.

"I don't know," I said; "it's a big secret. Even the doctor won't tell me." I took her hand. "How are you doing?"

She sat down on a chair next to the bed.

"I'll manage," she said. "One of my neighbors is helping me make the arrangements. The funeral is

Thursday afternoon." Her face got a dazed look when she said that.

"That's a hard thing to do, I know. You loved your husband, didn't you?" I said gently, testing her.

She nodded, staring into space.

"Yes, very much," she said softly. "Maybe Frank wasn't the best husband a woman ever had but he was always good to me. He always treated me the best he knew how." She came out of her reverie suddenly and looked at me. "What happened to you?"

I told her. She was horrified. She asked if I knew who the men were.

"No, but I'm going to find out," I said.

"What do you mean?"

"This isn't over yet, Nora. When I get out of here I'm going to look into this thing a little deeper. I'd still like to know where Frank was those two days. Wouldn't you?"

She was unprepared for the question and it took her a moment to answer. Finally she shrugged.

"I don't know," she said. "It really doesn't matter now. He's dead. What good could it do? It couldn't bring him back."

"No. But it might tell us why he died." It didn't register with her.

"If you find those men you might get hurt again."

"That's the way they want me to think," I said. "If I find them I might find Frank's killer."

She was visibly shocked. "What —what do you mean? It was an accident!"

I shook my head.

"But of course it was," she protested. "Even the police said so."

"I disagree with them, Nora. And until I find out for sure I can't just forget it. Frank died of smoke inhalation, so he was alive when the fire started; but that doesn't mean he was conscious. I don't think Frank's death was an accident any more than my beating was."

She didn't answer, but took her hand away from me and forced a nervous smile, then stood up.

"You'll be here a while, I suppose," she said weakly.

"The doctor said a week or ten days," I told her. "Nora, did you hear anything before the fire started?"

"No," she murmured. "The sound of the flames woke me, and I looked out and saw the fire." She shuddered, unable to go on, then turned and hurried out.

As she left I knew I knew no more than before. But my suspicions were stronger. Somewhere along the line she had lied to me; otherwise George couldn't have known who I was and that I had the snapshot.

Wednesday I couldn't stand it any longer and raised hell with the doctor. He said he'd let me out Thursday if I insisted but I would have to stay in bed at home. I insisted.

Thursday morning I left and hopped a cab home. I put a black suit on over my bandages and took

another cab to the cemetery to wait. My car had been towed home from the road where the police had found me next to it, unconscious and bleeding. It was nowhere near where the beating had taken place.

They'd checked out the cabin. The Geauga County sheriff's office had found it was owned by an elderly couple who rarely used it. It had been broken into and yielded no evidence that could be of any use. Besides that the East Cleveland police were peeved at me for losing the snapshot of the man with the gun. They wanted me to come down as soon as I was able and go through their mug books looking for him.

George.

I stood in the cemetery and hoped that if I ever met him I'd have the sense not to get myself in trouble.

It was clouding up in the west. Black clouds were rolling in, fighting each other for space in the sky. Later they would build to thunderheads and finish their battle in a rain of lightning and thunder.

The funeral procession finally showed up and I stood on the sidelines and watched while they went through the whole rigmarole of putting a man in the ground with more ceremonious respect than they'd ever shown him while he was alive. I was becoming a cynic. The case was getting to me. Like I'd told Hunter, it had become personal.

She saw me after it was all over and I nodded to her. Even under the black veil I could see she was shocked. I wasn't supposed to be out of the hospital yet. She didn't try to come over and talk to me, which was all right; all I'd wanted was for her to see me.

LEO GINETTI was there and I asked him if he was going back to the bar. He said yes and I hitched a ride with him. In the car we talked about what a shame it was and after that he didn't want to talk any more. Frank had been alive until I came around with my questions

and Ginetti resented me because of that.

After we went in he poured me a drink, perhaps in apology for his long silence, and I asked him what I'd come to ask him Saturday.

"Leo, did Frank have a locker or something around here?" I said. "Something with personal stuff in it?"

He thought a moment. "You know, come to think of it, yeah. Inna back he got a box."

"Good deal," I said, "let's go have a look at it." He wasn't sure whether we should or not but I told him that if there were anything valuable in it I would make sure Mrs. Pillino got it.

The box was a small cardboard thing shoved under one of the worktables in the kitchen. Inside it was a yellow envelope full of negatives and a thin notebook. One of the negatives was the snapshot of George. I tried not to show my excitement and asked Leo to call me a cab.

I didn't want to form any conclusions until I'd had prints made of all of them and examined the notebook, so I took the stuff down to the Agency because we have our own darkroom and a man on duty there all day. On the ride back I watched the thunderheads forming in the west, preparing for the aerial violence that was to come. It occurred to me that before it yas over there might be some violence on the ground too.

An hour later I had the answer. Half of it anyway. Frank had known who George was, and so had Nora because there were several pictures of her and George together. And now I knew who he was too. It was all there in the notebook, some of it between the lines.

His name was George Nicholas and he was a suspected narcotics smuggler. I had known the name but not the face, because we get the same Ohio State Patrol info sheets the police do and they rarely print pictures.

He was not wanted now, so far as I knew, but he would be as soon as the police got the pictures and notes that Frank had made. Frank had painstakingly gathered evidence against Nicholas and had gotten pointers along the way from me without letting me suspect what he was doing. He'd wanted to put George Nicholas away because he was running around with Nora.

And if Frank had loved his wife and felt she still loved him this was a way to get her back. Not an easy way, but a way.

And at the fifty-ninth minute he'd been caught at it.

That snapshot had been taken with the care of a professional photographer. After he'd taken it Nicholas had fired the shot at him, not before. He'd probably been sneaking around the boat and taking pictures of what had been going on inside—a narcotics pickup, maybe. Nicholas had heard something and

come up on the deck, gun in hand.

But Frank had needed one more picture. Or maybe he'd known he'd never get away without the element of surprise. He flashed the picture in Nicholas's face and ran. Nicholas chased him all the way to the car and shot at him even as he was driving away. That's where the bullet hole I'd found in the car had come from.

And Nicholas had found out who it was. Probably he'd gotten the license number and had it traced. Anyway he showed up at the bar the next day and they set up a meeting to discuss things. The best surmise I could come up with was that Frank had tried to blackmail George into leaving Nora alone and George hadn't dared let anyone with that kind of information stay alive. That was Wednesday night.

And Frank had been alive when the fire started Friday night. What had happened during those two days? George would have contacted Nora. He'd have had to in order to be sure she didn't go to the police. Maybe he hadn't gotten to her in time and she had hired me first. Or, more likely, he had and she'd hired me anyway.

But why? Why hire me to find Frank if she knew where he was? I wondered if Nora had known that Frank knew about her and George. I doubted it. It looked like George had kidnaped Frank and held him for those two days. Had Frank gotten away Friday night only to have an accidental fire when he got home? That didn't sound right. If Frank had been murdered, which one of them had done it?

There were too many things I didn't know. But there was a way to find out.

I left the carton of negatives and the prints I had made in the darkroom and took the keys to one of the company cars because it had an automatic transmission and I was in no condition to drive a stick shift. Frank's notes had given me the address of the house George Nicholas owned and it wasn't too far from the Gordon Park boat docks. Nora knew that I was out of the hospital and was going to continue the investigation on my own. She had probably already told George. I would have to hurry.

But first I had a stop to make—the arms room of the agency.

I would need a gun tonight because I would have to follow this up myself. It would take all night to convince the police of what had happened and by that time George would be long gone. And I had a feeling he'd either take Nora with him or leave her body behind.

The agency keeps an arms room because it rents armed guards for plant protection. The guns are issued to the men when they are hired. Among the weapons there are Remington pump twelve gauge shotguns to be carried in the cars during riots. We lease burglar alarms and normally when they go off the

police are called and a man from the agency goes out with a key to the building to help the police shake the place down and secure it afterwards.

But in the event of a riot many alarms go off at once in an area, and the police are tied up trying to control the disturbance and don't have the time or manpower to answer intrusion alarms as well. When that happens we answer our own and the men who go are armed.

I picked up one of the Remington pumps and loaded it with five shells: when you go into an area where you know you probably will be shot at you don't take a pistol.

It was dark when I got there and I sat outside the house for a few minutes, watching. Thunder boomed, but the real downpour hadn't started yet. So far it was only a drizzle.

Only one corner of the house was lit; a window and the front door. Lightning flashed and outside I could see the Caddy and the Ford. George had his two goons with him. I got out and crept up beneath the one lite window and listened. My back was getting wet and so was the shotgun but I didn't care. I could hear voices but I couldn't make out what they were saying. One of the voices was a woman's and she sounded upset. Whoever she was talking to was mad.

The rain started to get serious, coming down in sheets now while thunder jarred the windows of the house, and I decided the waiting was over. I moved around to the front door and put one eye to the corner of the glass. George Nicholas was there all right, along with Nora and the two goons.

I stepped back and reached out and tried to turn the knob, the shotgun ready in my hand. The knob turned easily and when I had turned it as far as it would go I jerked the door open and leaped inside.

"Freeze!" I yelled through clenched teeth, my side aching from the sudden movement.

For a moment they were caught as though a movie film had stopped. Nora was sitting in a chair to my left, almost in tears. George had been pacing the other side of the room and was slightly to my right. Across the room the two startled goons sat, on a couch.

The wind slammed the door behind me and I pointed to a wastebasket in the corner of the room.

"Put the guns in there," I said, covering them. They did, all three of them. They weren't about to argue with a shotgun. But George couldn't keep his mouth shut.

"Nobody say anything," he warned before I could stop him.

I grinned at him.

"You don't have to," I lied. "I heard most of it outside."

"Like hell you did," he sneered.

"Shut up," I told him. I turned to Nora. "You want to tell me about it?" I asked her. If I could get information out of any of them it would be her. But she shook her

head. "All right," I said, "why did you murder your husband?"

Her head jerked up. "I didn't!" she pleaded, pointing at George. "He did."

"Shut up!" he yelled viciously. I felt like cracking him one with the shotgun but it would mean taking my concentration completely off the other two for a moment; and they were professionals.

I knew most of the answers now, but I still wanted to hear them. "Why did you burn him up, then? Did you think he was dead?"

She nodded slowly. Nicholas was going to interrupt but I stopped him with a look.

"George told me he was dead," she said, her voice a dull monotone. "He said we had to burn the body to cover up." She turned and glared at him. "But he wasn't dead then, was he, George? Otherwise how could he die from the smoke?"

"Nora," George pleaded, "I thought he was dead."

She looked at me. "It's over now, isn't it?"

I nodded.

"I have the negatives," I said. She didn't seem surprised but Nicholas was.

"George kidnaped Frank Wednesday night," she went on. "He'd tried to blackmail George into leaving me alone. He had some pictures and threatened to turn the negatives over to the police." She threw Nicholas a look of pure hatred. "Of course George couldn't chance that. So he knocked Frank out and brought him here."

"It wasn't like that," George blurted, trying to defend himself. "I was going to go along with it until he got greedy. He wanted money, lots of it. Five thousand dollars so he could treat her in style like I had. The bum."

"Don't you call him that!" she screamed at him.

He sighed. "Anyway I brought him here and tied him up." I was watching him closely. He wasn't talking now because he thought it was all over for him. He had something in mind."

I said, "So then you called up your two friends here to help guard him."

"Yeah."

"And you called Nora to tell her to find the negatives for you, right?"

Nora's face turned pale.

"How can you know that?" she breathed.

"Why else burn Frank's body in the darkroom but to destroy the negatives you were sure he had hidden there, even though you couldn't find them?"

"That was George's doing, too." she said quickly.

"Like hell," George put in. "You went along with it."

"I thought he was already dead," she cried at him. "You told me he was."

I interrupted them.

"George tried to beat the information out of him, didn't he?" She

nodded, crying silently now. "When he couldn't get Frank to talk and you couldn't find the negatives he thought it would solve everything by burning Frank up in the darkroom and making it look like an accident."

"No!" George protested. "I thought he was dead, I tell you. He collapsed when we beat him up and we couldn't get him to come around. I thought he'd had a heart attack or something."

"Liar!" she screamed.

"Shut up, both of you," I told them. The two characters on the couch were leaning forward so that if a chance came they would be able to spring for the guns in the wastebasket. I looked at them, almost hoping they would try, but they saw me and leaned back.

I asked Nora, "Why did you come to me?"

She threw another hate filled glance at Nicholas. "I needed something to try to threaten him with," she said dejectedly. "He wouldn't let Frank go and Frank wouldn't tell where the negatives were because he was sure they would kill him then. I thought if I told George I'd hired a private detective to look for Frank he'd get scared and let Frank go."

"Fat chance," Nicholas laughed.

I asked her, "After I left your house Friday evening you took a cab here, didn't you?"

"Yes. I had to talk to Frank. I pleaded with him to tell them where the negatives were but he wouldn't listen to me." Tears were running down her cheeks now. "He didn't trust me either, by then."

"So you left and came home?" Her head drooped in a nod. "Then what?"

She took a deep breath, trying to choke back her emotions. "About two-thirty George drove in with Frank's car and said that—that he was dead."

"And that the two of you had to burn the evidence," I finished for her.

Nora nodded. I could visualize the whole thing all too clearly. She picked up her purse from the floor beside her and put it on her lap and opened it. I made the mistake of thinking she was reaching for a handkerchief and I was watching George and the others when she pulled the little automatic out and pointed it at me.

"Put the gun down, Vern," she said softly. I turned to her and pointed the shotgun at her for effect but she had stopped crying and was unafraid, perhaps for the first time in a week.

"You wouldn't shoot me, Nora," I said.

"I will if I have to, Vern." Her eyes told me she meant it and I could no more use a shotgun on her than on myself. I laid it on a nearby chair and stepped away from it.

George relaxed. "Good girl, honey," he said, walking over to her. But she was pointing the little automatic at him now.

"Stand still, George," she said firmly. "I came here to kill you and I'm going to do it." His face blanketed with disbelief. "Do you think I'd let you kill again like you were going to, George?" she asked him. He stood a few feet away from her, stunned.

"Who was he going to kill this time?" I asked.

"You," she said.

I thought that one over for a minute, then tried to reason with her. "Nora, all we have to do is call the police and that will end it. This isn't necessary."

"He killed my husband," she said. "The police would only send me to jail along with him. I'm not going to jail for a murder I didn't commit."

"If you kill him you'll go to jail for one you did commit, though," I told her.

"You wouldn't testify against me," she said, looking at me. "You like me, don't you,Vern?"

There was too much hope and sorrow in her voice.

"Yes," I said, "but that still wouldn't stop me."

She couldn't believe it and kept staring at me. Then everything happened at once. George dove for the gun in Nora's hand and I had known it was going to happen and leapt for the shotgun on the chair. The automatic went off with a sharp crack as Nora screamed. He was hit in the leg but he had the gun and tried to turn it on her. There was just enough space between them to be sure she wouldn't be hit and just enough time before he could get his shot off.

I pulled the trigger and George Nicholas took it in the chest. He flipped over sideways and I saw the other two moving for the wastebasket. I swung the Remington on them, jacking another shell into the chamber, and yelled, "Sit down!" They did.

Nora ran into my arms, crying, and I held her with one arm until she was through, keeping the shotgun on the others. Her sobs subsided, finally and I put her in a chair where she wouldn't have to look at the bloody thing on the floor and walked slowly toward the phone.

As I waited for the operator to get me the police I hoped Nora wouldn't have to spend too much time in a cell. She was an accessory to murder and I wouldn't be able to help her much. I would have enough trouble trying to keep myself out of jail, because unless I was a bad judge of people George Nicholas was dead.

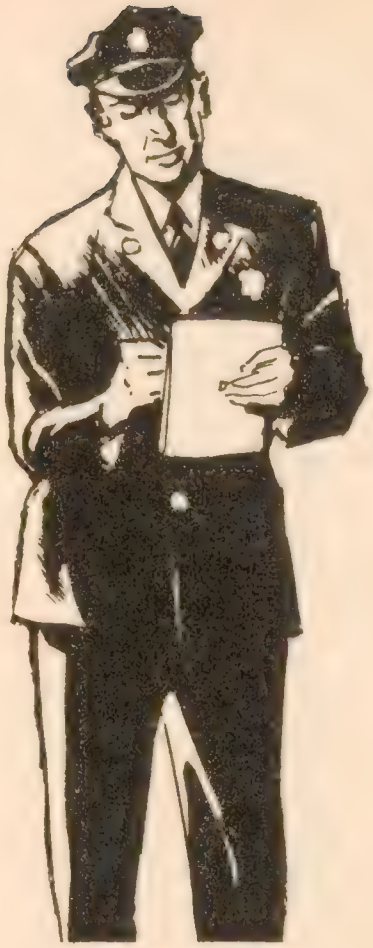
The Only MAGAZINE featuring MIKE SHAYNE every month.

He was happy. And why not — with a million bucks in loot?

POSSESSION

by

EDWARD WELLEN



AT HALF AN hour to midnight he walked into the eight-story brick building that housed the Missing Persons Bureau, the Juvenile Aid Bureau, the Bureau of Criminal Identification, the Ballistics Department, the Safe and Loft Squad, the Narcotics Squad, the Vice Squad, and the Property Clerk's Office.

As he entered he took out his handkerchief. Blowing his nose, he nodded to the yawning cop on duty in the main hall at the elevator. The cop on duty quickly shut his mouth and turned his face away from the Hong Kong flu.

He smiled behind his handkerchief, then pocketed it as he turned and walked up the steps to the second floor.

Light showed behind the door of the Missing Persons Bureau. There would be at least two detectives inside. The other offices on the second floor were dark. He stepped lightly past the frosty gleam of Missing Persons. He walked to the end of the hall, stopping at the door of the Property Clerk's Office.

He pulled his gloves from his hip pocket and put them on. He lifted a jimmy from inside his waistband, worked it into the jamb at the lock, waited, listened. At last a truck rumbled by. He forced the door.

He knew, in spite of the silence that followed, that he had tripped the burglar alarm. Crossing mental fingers, he listened to see if the alarm had triggered police action. After two minutes by his wrist watch he decided it was safe. He went in, closed the door after him, took out a small flashlight, and played its beam around the huge room.

The pencil beam wrote into existence bins that lined the walls from floor to ceiling, bins overflowing with lost property, unclaimed effects of deceased persons, evidence in criminal cases. The beam lingered on the weapons bin, where ten tons of pistols, rifles, shotguns, machine guns, brass knuckles, gravity knives, blackjacks, Nazi daggers, Samurai swords, and a crossbow awaited dumping from a Coast Guard cutter three miles out.

It lingered on the liquor bin, where thousands of bottles awaited the spring rite of smashing against a concrete wall. It lingered on the indecent section, where books, films, and devices awaited incinerating. The beam impatiently passed shelves of cameras, rows of books, cartons of shoes, stands of crutches, pots of marijuana, shelves of burglar tools.

The beam hit a metal door. This would be the vault with racks holding hundreds of fur coats, jackets, and stoles...mink, ermine, and sable. The beam skipped to another metal door. This would be the one he wanted. The beam picked out the lock. It looked like more than his jimmy could handle.

He shot his beam at his wrist watch and hurried back to the shelves of burglar tools tagged as evidence. He found what he needed.

The tremendous leverage of the tool sprung the lock with ease. He set the tool down, tugged open the door. He gazed at shelves of cash boxes. The labels helped him choose which to jimmy open. He soon had a million dollar pile of cash, jewelry, and heroin.

He raised his trouser legs by the crease and pulled down his stockings. He shoved the stuff into snap-fastened pouches strapped to his legs. He pulled up his stockings, the tops a tight fit over the pouches, brought his trouser legs smoothly down.

He shot the beam at his wrist watch. On schedule. He dropped his jimmy off on the burglar tool array. He let himself out after a listen told him the hallway was clear. He closed the door. He removed his gloves and stowed

them in his hip pocket. He stepped lightly past the frosty gleam of Missing Persons. He took out his handkerchief.

As he walked down the steps he rubbed the bannister with the cloth in case he had touched it on the way up. Blowing his nose, he nodded to the yawning cop on duty at the elevator. The cop on duty quickly shut his mouth and turned his face away from the Hong Kong flu.

He left the building, pocketed the handkerchief and walked into police headquarters. He nodded to the cop on duty at the elevator and rode to the fifth floor. It was midnight sharp when he entered Headquarters Communications Office.

The sergeant, knowing his relief man was always on the dot, got up with a blind glance at the clock, stretched, said it had been a quiet tour, and left.

There were moments when he forgot he had a million dollars strapped to his legs. But just before dawn he reached under the board and reconnected the wire he had loosened on his last shift. The burglar alarm of the Property Clerk's Office sounded. He sprang into action, calling the local precinct and the radio cars in the neighborhood. The cops closed in on the Property Clerk's Office.

MIKE SHAYNE Presents Next Month's Three Headliners:

●

DEAD MAN'S HERITAGE by BRETT HALLIDAY

The New Mike Shayne Short Novel

●

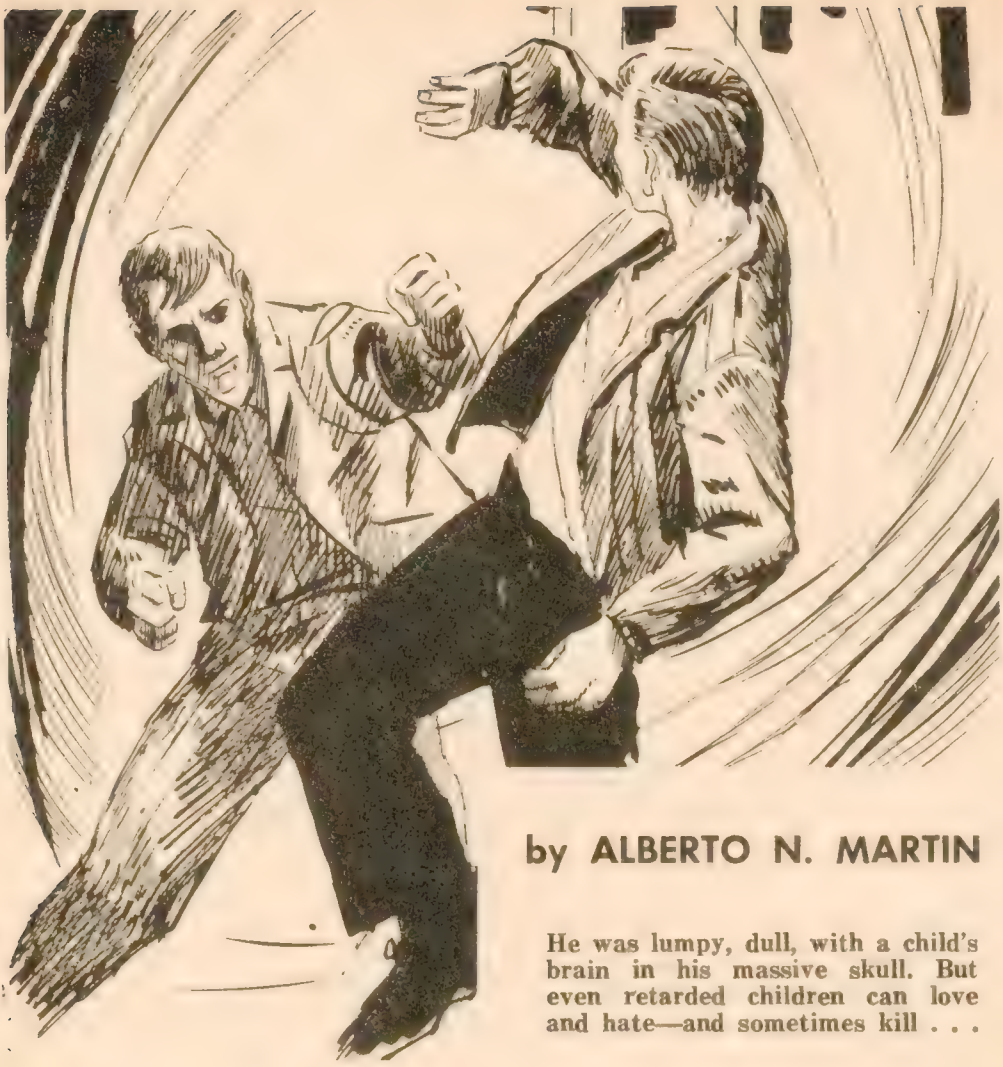
THE FALL OF AL CAPONE by DAVID MAZROFF

A True Crime Gangster Story

●

THREE WIVES TOO MANY by KENNETH FEARING

Another Department of Lost Stories Masterpiece



by ALBERTO N. MARTIN

He was lumpy, dull, with a child's brain in his massive skull. But even retarded children can love and hate—and sometimes kill . . .

THE CAT-ALYST

WILLY TARBELL was mentally retarded. In the same number of years it took normal men to become medical doctors or highly trained engineers, Willy had been able to grasp little more than the basic fundamentals of shoe repair; but it made him self supporting, and he received as much pleasure and satisfaction from his trade as doctors and engineers do from their professions.

Willie liked the smell of the glues and polishes. He liked the feel of the leathers as he bent and shaped them. He took pride in the work he did, never suspecting his skill was minimal.

Despite relatively poor workmanship, Willy received few complaints. He stood over six feet tall and weighed at least two-forty. His huge, thick-fingered hands and long hairy arms were usually enough to intimidate all but the most unimaginative. And any fault-finding that wasn't deterred by his size was generally turned aside by his sad grey eyes and his stuttered and simple-minded confession of blame: "O-o-oops."

Willy was as meek and docile as he was large. He wanted to please people and be liked. It was his habit to avoid conflict whenever possible. That's why he might not have rented the bachelor apartment of Michigan Avenue if the building superintendent had been there when the rental agent showed him the vacancy.

The superintendent, an aggressive little man hardly five feet tall, returned from his vacation two weeks after Willy had moved in. By then it was too late. Willy had already learned to look at comic books on the bus without missing his new stop. The walls of Willy's ground-floor apartment were now covered with his favorite pictures of boats and airplanes. Willy had become used to his new address and thought of it as home.

The first evening the building super was back, he knocked on Willy's door. He told Willy he'd be around to collect the rent the first of every month. As the super talked, Willy crowded too close to him, hovering over him. Willy had no sense of social distance. This wasn't a handicap in a repair shop where a counter separated him from the customers, but in the doorway of the apartment it was something less than polite and something more than irritating.

He backed the smaller man against the door jamb where, not wanting to address his words to Willy's chest, he was forced to tilt his head back. When he did, Willy brought his own face to within inches of the super's.

It became apparent that, like many small men, the super was overly sensitive about his size. His face and neck turned pink, then red, then purple.

"I don't like big people!" he raged, pushing angrily at Willy's broad chest. "Or stupid people! Or dirty people! And you qualify all three ways!"

Willy stumbled back a step, and the super walked rapidly away with his back stiff and his small fists clenched.

Willy watched him go, not understanding a bit of it. Stupid? Dirty? He looked down at the matted hair on his arms and brushed off some of the leather shavings that were trapped there. His palms and

fingers were stained a deep mahogany and were scarred from the many times his trimming knife had slipped

After watching a few minutes to see if the strange little man was going to return, Willy mumbled "Oops," accepting the blame for whatever had gone wrong. Then he closed the door and went back to the comic book he'd been reading.

The next day Willy made things worse instead of better. The super was walking away from the apartment building on some errand or other at the same time Willy was returning from work. When they reached the ten-to-fifteen foot distance where it's normal for people to glance away from one another, Willy continued to look at the man.

The super glanced over as they passed and caught Willy watching him. His face grew red with sudden anger.

Willy had been raised in an orphanage. He'd had no parents to teach not to crowd or stare at others, and it's doubtful he would have retained the lesson even if he had learned it. But Willy's behavior wasn't recognized as the harmless act of a simple man. The building super reacted as though he's received a great personal insult.

"What're you staring at?" the super demanded. "What's so interesting?"

Willy waved his hands helplessly in the air. "Nothing," he stammered.

"So you think I'm nothing, do you?" the super challenged. He hopped about in front of Willy, expending some of his pent-up fury. "If this was January instead of June I'd show you what nothing is. Nothing is no heat when the snow starts falling — that's what nothing is."

From then on Willy went to great lengths to avoid the super. If he saw the man on the street, he'd enter a store or cross to the other side. If the man was standing at the front entrance, Willy would enter or leave the apartment building through the rear. And Willy's behavior didn't go unnoticed. The super seemed to get a preverse pleasure from the power he had over the larger man and he appeared in Willy's path with greater frequency.

It was a warm evening near the end of June when the cat showed up. Willy's bedroom window opened on an alley, and he had it raised to admit an evening breeze. He was lying on the bed in his shorts, looking at a picture magazine, when he heard a scraping sound. He turned and saw a cat pull itself up onto the window sill.

It was undersized and undernourished, and had apparently been in an accident some time before; its tail was only a short stub. Its ugly coat consisted of dirty patches of white, gray, orange, and brown fur put together without regard for symmetry or design. The animal was so thin that its ribs and backbone were visible.

"Hello, p-pussy cat," Willy said,

putting down the magazine and rolling onto his side.

The cat stood with its stub of tail, no longer than a man's little finger, pointing straight up. It looked around the room, then leaped to the floor and came to the side of Willy's bed.

Willy stroked it gently a few times, then swung his legs over the edge of the bed and stood up.

"You want some milk?" Willy asked.

He went to his kitchenette with the animal at his heels. There was no milk in the refrigerator, but there was a half pint of cream that had been destined for Willy's coffee. Willy filled a small bowl and set it on the floor. The cat hurried to it and lowered its head It didn't raise it again until the cream was gone.

When Willy returned to his bed the cat followed him and curled up at its foot. Willy watched it sleep for a while, then turned out the light and stretched out. He was careful not to disturb his guest.

In the morning the cat was gone, and Willy was a little disappointed. At work that day he kept glancing at one of the advertisements for replacement soles and heels used to decorate the shop. It featured a cat's head as a trademark and it reminded Willy of the visitor he'd had.

He didn't think he'd ever see the cat again. Willy had just finished eating a TV dinner when the cat came walking into the kitchenette from the direction of the bedroom. Willy fed it and talked to it. Later, he tied a string to a ball of newspaper and played with the cat for over an hour.

After that the cat slept on his lap while he read comic books and stroked its fur. From time to time it would open one eye, purr contentedly for a few moments, then drop back to sleep. When Willy went to bed the cat followed him and curled up at its foot as it had done the night before.

The cat was gone again in the morning, but Willy left the window slightly open so it could get in if it wanted to while he was at work. He also left food for it on the floor of the kitchenette.

That established the pattern. The window remained open a few inches, even when it rained, and food was always left on the kitchenette floor. The cat came and went as it pleased and slept at the foot of Willy's bed. In a very few days the animal began to fill out and gain weight. It had adopted Willy.

And then the first of the month rolled around and the building super came to collect the rent. He was counting the money Willy had just handed him when the cat chose that moment to cross the room.

The super stuffed the money into his pocket and pointed a shaking finger at the cat.

"*Mister* Tarbell," he said in a voice like a marine drill instructor.

"You know the rule — no kids, no pets. Alley cats are dirty. They claw the furniture, get hair all over, and leave piles of filth everywhere. You'll have to get rid of it."

Willy had remembered the rule as soon as the man mentioned it. "He's not my c-cat," Willy said defensively. "He just visits me once in a while."

"In that case you won't mind if I throw him out," the super said, rushing into the apartment.

The cat faced him, arched its back, and stood its ground. When the super bent to grab it by the neck, the cat lashed out and left four crimson gashes on the back of his hand. Then it retreated into the bedroom and disappeared through the open window.

But it wasn't gone long. It seemed the super had no more than left to bandage his wounded hand before the cat came leaping back through the open window. It went directly to the chair where Willy was sitting and curled up on his lap with a self-satisfied purr. It was an ugly animal, but Willy was fond of it. He decided to make sure the cat was nowhere around the next time he had to open the apartment door.

Unfortunately, it wasn't that easy. The very next morning Willy looked out the window shortly after the cat had left. The super was in the ally, watching the cat lope away; and when he turned to the window where Willy was standing, the expression on his face left no doubt

he'd seen it leave Willy's apartment.

Later, when Willy was rushing past the super's door on his way to work, the door opened and the man stepped out. Willy pretended not to see him, but the man called after him: "Don't worry, Tarbell. I'll get rid of that cat for you."

For the next few days, Willy wasn't much use at work. He was too preoccupied with thoughts of what the super might be doing to the cat. Each evening he hurried back to the apartment and, if the cat wasn't already there, he waited anxiously for it to appear.

Finally, Willy worked up enough courage to speak to the super. One night after hurrying home to see if the cat was all right, he knocked at the man's door.

"Yeah, what's the trouble?" the

super asked. He'd unlocked his door, but the chain latch was attached and the door was open only a few inches.

"I don't want you to hurt the cat," Willy said.

"Are you threatening me or something?" the man shot back.

Willy shifted his weight from one foot to the other, then glared defiantly back at the super. "Just d-don't you hurt him, that's all," he said and went back to his apartment.

During the next couple of weeks Willy ran into the super half a dozen times, and the man always called him *"Mister* Catlover." Willy didn't mind, though. The super didn't make any more threats, and that's all that mattered to Willy.

Besides, he was having so much fun playing with the animal, he almost forgot the super existed. The cat was growing rapidly, and he had to devise new games for them to play as the cat tired of the old ones.

One evening he made a loop from some stiff wire and sat cross-legged on his bed, blowing colored bubbles. The cat raced wildly about, leaping and dashing to catch the floating balls, until it was too tired to continue. They had so much fun that Willy stayed up well past his bed time.

In the morning, as usual, the cat was gone. But when Willy returned from work that evening, it still hadn't returned. And the next day and the one after that it remained absent, its food untouched. Willy began to suspect that the building super might have done something to the cat, but it was another day before he could overcome his natural aversion to conflict and knocked at the man's door.

"Yeah, what's the trouble?" the super asked.

"The cat. He's been gone for four days," Willy said. His eyes were dark-ringed from loss of sleep.

The super looked at him for a few seconds, then shrugged. "That's nothing to worry about, mister. Heck, this is the season that a young tom like that spends all his time outside. He'll show up again."

Willy went back to his apartment, but he still didn't feel right. He couldn't concentrate on any of his comic books. Something was wrong, but he couldn't put his finger on it. He lay awake until the early hours of the morning before finding comfort in sleep.

But Willy no sooner awoke than he knew what had been wrong the day before—the super had acted pleasantly, instead of trying to start an argument. Now Willy was more suspicious than ever. He was certain the super had done something to the cat. The man hadn't acted naturally when he'd been asked about the animal.

Willy didn't go to work that day. He paced back and forth across the apartment, brooding about the cat. He remembered how the super had tried to grab it by the neck the first time he'd seen it. He remembered

the terrible things the man had said about cats and the way he'd looked when he said them.

It was an extremely hot day, the first of August, without a trace of a breeze. As the temperature rose, so did Willy's anger. By early evening the pressure in Willy's chest had reached an explosive level. And then the super knocked at the door to collect the rent.

Willy swung open the door, grabbed him by the neck, and pulled him into the room, swinging the door shut behind him. He wrapped his other hand around the smaller man's neck and lifted him bodily from the floor. The man kicked wildly and beat at Willy's arms, but Willy hung on and increased the force of his grip.

It was over quickly. In a few minutes the super's face had turned an ugly blue-black, and his lifeless body hung limply from Willy's powerful hands. Finally, Willy dropped the body to the rug and stood over it with his chest heaving from the effort. His breath came in short rapid gasps.

That's when the cat came out of the bedroom and crossed to the kitchenette where its food was. Willy watched it go, then looked down at the super's body.

"Oops," he said quietly. Then he touched his dry lips with the tip of his tongue and repeated, "Oops."

In the Next Issue:

Another DEPARTMENT OF LOST STORIES Masterpiece

THREE WIVES TOO MANY

by KENNETH FEARING

Many wives had he, all of them doting and ready to tell the world that he knew how to live. But one by one they vanished, slain by a mysterious hand. And came the day when the prize womanizer of all had to ask himself: I knew how to live, sure. But—do I know how to die? *Don't miss this engrossing different crime story by one of the master fiction kings of all. Reserve your copy now!*

Here, for the first time, is the incredible true story of the rise and fall of a genius in criminal organization, a man who bathed the city of Chicago in blood for ten long years, during which time a thousand men died violent deaths. "This was Al Capone" features the rise to dizzy heights of a thug who corrupted police, district attorneys, judges, mayors, politicians, and the city itself. No single man, before or after has ever equalled his sinister and overwhelming hold on one of America's largest cities.

THIS WAS AL CAPONE: THE MASTERMIND OF CRIME

by DAVID MAZROFF

FIRST OF TWO INSTALLMENTS

AL CAPONE came to Chicago in February, 1919 a bum from the Five Points Gang of New York, a gunman, thug, muscleman, thief, and murderer. He was called to the Windy City by Johnny Torrio to act as a bodyguard for Jim Colisimo and to eliminate certain rivals who were threatening Colisimo's South Side bailiwick of crime and vice.

Capone came on the scene during an era of fury and unrest, a time of incredible happenings. It was a strange time of jazz, of the Charleston, of skirts above the knees, rolled stockings, the raccoon coat, the hip flask filled with rotgut moonshine whisky, and the rumble seats of roadsters.

What had been decent and moral was laughed at with scorn and contempt. It was an unreal world filled with tidal waves of excitement-hungry doughboys roaring back from a great war fought to establish peace.

There was no peace, not the one

gained in the fighting nor the one which met the returning soldiers at home. They returned from France, from the battlefields of the Marne, Belleau Wood, Chateau Thierry—not altogether the same. Many of them were plagued by what they had seen and known. A little sick with the frozen memory of the combats, they sought forgetfulness in all that was available to them, for they had lived on the edges of hell.

When they touched the shores of their country again they found a new law had been passed, one which prohibited them from buying a glass of good whisky or a bottle of ale. It wasn't right, and they didn't want this law which had been passed in their absence. In the captured vision of the many things they had planned to do one of the things was to drink a little and to rediscover again the conversation that was to be had when men sat together in a saloon, drank their beer, told each other ribald stories and laughed in unrestrained good cheer.

So they were ready for the speakeasies, the basements where a dozen tables and chairs made up the furniture and a locked door protected them from raids by prohibition agents.

It wasn't the same. It was intense, grotesque, harsh. There was no camaraderie. But it was the only way. They learned to know that drinking illegal beer and illegal booze was a privilege created by immensely dramatic conflicts between men who were dark-visaged, saturnine, cruel and deadly.

For the names of these men who provided them with beer and booze were frightening ones—Dutch Schultz, Legs Diamond, Lucky Luciano, Bugs Moran, Owney Madden, Johnny Torrio, and a scarfaced hood called Al Capone.

Capone was welcomed by Big Jim Colisimo, boss of the first ward. Colisimo had literally lived in the gutter prior to his rise as a crooked politician, vice lord, and night club owner. He had been a street sweeper in that same first ward which was peopled predominantly by hard-working Italians.

He had good looks and charm, and used these effectively to advantage, persuading the Italian contingent to vote his way. The control of several hundred votes gave him power and the two bosses of the Levee, as the first ward was known, Bath-house John Coughlin and Mike "Hinky-Dink" Kenna, took him under their wing.

Colisimo brought the tremendously ugly vista of full-scale crime to Chicago—the soaring violence, the teeming, churning infamy, the feverish swarming of hoods and gunmen, killers, and corruptors.

He saw the limitless profits to be made from all the forms of illegal enterprises—vice, beer, liquor, labor protection rackets—saw that this was a new era, a richer one than ever existed in the regions of the Levee, that the old houses of pros-

titution which had been closed by Mayor Carter Harrison could be opened again, could be run with the blessings of the police, with the sanction of the politicians, if it were handled properly.

Colisimo introduced the fifty cent and dollar brothels, alley beer and rotgut whisky. He organized the speakeasy owners into a solid combine by offering to sell them his beer and whisky at a price according to the total sales of all. He persuaded Italian, German, Jewish and other ethnic group grocery store owners to sell them their entire allotments of sugar, and persuaded the Italian families to cook alcohol for him from that sugar. He thus had a production type setup from sugar to alcohol to speakeasy.

It was a pattern that was to be followed by Johnny Torrio and after Torrio by Capone, but it was Colisimo who taught it to them.

There was a sort of psychological union between the people and the Prohibition time gangster and hoodlum. One had something to sell which the other wanted to buy, and since it was illegal to do both they were in a sort of sub-rosa consort which made them co-conspirators in a plot to defeat the law. That was the basis of the acceptance of the hood and gangster by society at large during Prohibition.

The vice and crime introduced by Colisimo, and the hoods and gangsters who went with it, were strangely attractive in the understandable way that all unknown and unexperienced things are attractive, even as is the incommunicable sorrow of the tomb. It drew the shop girl, office girl, debutante, truck driver, clerk, business executive, and the very politicians who fostered the law and were sworn to uphold it.

It became fashionable to know hoods and gangsters to be seen in their company, to be on more or less intimate terms with them. They were sleek, silent and soaked in a heart-thumping scent of thrills and danger. They were a new breed, apart from the thug of the turtleneck sweater and the coarse mien.

There was a fascination in the furious tumult which surrounded them, in their arrogance, their air of fearful force, in the image they made of all that was contrary to morality and ethics. They reeked of a nameless terror, a sense of tragedy, an intolerable yet gripping desolation, and all of it combined to create the same tautly drawn tension which develops before a known convulsive explosion is about to be set off.

Big Jim Colisimo was a Sicilian. In Palermo he had been a force around the docks, a foreman, a member of the Mafia. He also was an extortionist.

Forced to leave Palermo, he fled to America, landed in Baltimore and got a job laying ties on the B & O Railroad. Transferred to Chicago, he quit the railroad and took a job as a street sweeper in the first ward, where he met and married an Ital-

ian girl named Victoria Morosco who sold flowers and shoe laces in the streets.

When he became a power he placed Victoria in charge of several brothels. After he opened his cafe on Wabash and 22nd Street he met a lovely former singer in Ziegfield Follies and gave her a job singing in his cafe, fell in love with her after divorcing Victoria.

Johnny Torrio and Al Capone watched and waited like two jackals. Torrio wanted to take over. That had been in his mind when he sent for Capone. The actual killing of a man was not in Torrio's blood. He needed Capone for that. Torrio also saw that the city was wide open to attack, to organization, that it was run loosely, that the other gang bosses were limited in organizational talents.

"Colisimo has grown soft since he married Dale Winter," Torrio said to Capone. "He's ready to be taken. We take him out of the picture and the first ward belongs to us. Once we get that we can spread out, take in the Loop, the West Side, Cicero, and all of the South Side. But you have to be careful with him. He's still dangerous."

Al Capone shook his head, "No he's not. Dale has taken out all his guts. She changed the cafe around to fit her personality, made it a real high class place, and she's changed him, his dress, his voice, his friends. He's all opera and tuxedo. I know his routine like a book. Leave it to me."

AL CAPONE

"You intend to do this alone?"

"No. I'll send for Frankie Yale out of New York."

SOME TIME BEFORE noon on Tuesday, May 11, 1920 Jim Colisimo and Dale Winter awoke in their apartment at 3156 Vernon Avenue, bathed and dressed, and had a leisurely breakfast. After breakfast, Colisimo told his bride that he had to see a man in the cafe at four o'clock.

"Will you send the car back for me, Jim? Mother and I want to do some shopping."

"Sure, honey. I'll send the car

right back." He kissed her and left It was then almost two o'clock.

The chauffeur dropped Colisimo off at the corner of Wabash and 22nd Street about two-thirty and sent the car back for Dale Winter and her mother. Colisimo didn't go directly to the cafe. He didn't get there until a little after four. He passed through the square door, which was north of the round door, the original entrance to the cafe before it was enlarged, and went straight back to the little office in the rear of the restaurant. There he found Frank Camilla, his secretary and bookkeeper.

"What's doing, Frank?" Colisimo asked.

"Nothing much. I'm going over last night's business."

"How was it?"

"Very good. Getting better every day. It's a gold mine, been like that ever since you changed the place around and kept the riff-raff out. These swells will pay any amount to be seen here."

Colisimo smiled." It wasn't my idea to change the place. It was Dale's. She's a smart girl."

Camilla grinned. "Yeah, and very beautiful. You're a lucky guy, Jim. They don't come any better than that girl."

"I know. Where's Mike?"

"I think he's gone down to Water Street to buy provisions for tonight. That's what he said, anyway. Jim, you wanted to call Mr. DeStefano today about those government agents who were here yesterday. I'm reminding you."

"Sure, sure," replied Colisimo, "glad you did. I'll call Rocco right away. I think those government men were snoopers for the Treasury Department."

Colisimo called Rocco DeStefano and was told by the lawyer's secretary that Mr. DeStefano was out but that he was expected at any moment.

"Tell Rocco I called," Colisimo said, "and to call me back as soon as he gets in. It's important. I'll be here, in the cafe."

He hung up and went into the kitchen then to talk with Antonio Caesarino, his chef. He talked with him for about five minutes and then went through the semi-darkness of the restaurant toward the front door.

The front entrance of the north door opened on a small lobby, and as you came in there was a little cloakroom on the left. Across the cloakroom was an alcove where a cashier sat, and a few feet west of the cashier's alcove, toward the restaurant proper, was a small inclined stand which held telephone books.

In the cloakroom were Al Capone and Frankie Yale, head of the New York branch of the Mafia, a gunman and hood. Capone whispered to Yale and Yale nodded his head.

About five minutes after Colisimo finished talking with his chef there were several muffled shots. Caesarino and Camilla said later they

heard only two shots, or what they thought were shots because the sounds were softer than the usual pistol sounds. Frank Camilla decided to take a look. He walked from his office into the south room of the cafe but saw nothing, and then walked out through the round door on to Wabash Avenue.

The door locked behind him and he had to walk to the north or square door in order to reenter the restaurant. When he did so he saw Colisimo on the floor. He felt Jim Colisimo's body. There was no life there. He looked around the room. On the telephone stand he found a note, in Colisimo's handwriting. It read:

Swan. I made out the regular statement. You fill in the rest as you see fit. Tell the day men to look after the drugstore and see that they find out where to get the stuff and refill. Don't keep over a dozen men. If you've got more, ask someone to lay off."—Bank P.S. Anything you make over $50 *belongs to me. Mickey is off.*

That was the note. The signature "Bank" was given to Colisimo by certain gamblers who borrowed money from him and so referred to him as their bank. But what did the note refer to and to whom? Was Mickey his partner, Mike the Greek Potzin? And who was Swan? These questions never were answered.

Frank Camilla ran back into the kitchen, where he found Abe Arends, one of Colisimo's managers. "Get the police, quick!" he shouted at Arends. "Jim's been shot!"

Arends called a doctor and the police. The doctor came first. He declared that Colisimo had died almost instantly. Chief of Police John J. Garrity and Chief of Detectives Mooney came, with detectives and men from the office of State's Attorney Maclay Hoyne. All the employees were rounded up and isolated. They were then grilled individually. No one knew a thing. Joe Gavilla, a waiter, led the detectives to a table in the north room where they found four empty beer bottles and four glasses.

"There were two men and two women here," Gavilla said. "I served them. They came in about an hour before Mr. Colisimo arrived. They drank only this one beer and left. I never saw them before."

On the table, among the bottles and glasses, detectives found a slip of paper. It bore a telephone number. "Calumet 4029." It was the number of the National Rubber Products Company. No one at the place knew anything. On the same slip of paper was a name and address: *Samuel Lavine. Vernon Avenue.* It was the same street on which Colisimo and his bride, Dale Winter, lived. Other words scrawled on the slip of paper were "Saturday evening"—"B u f f a lo "—"So long vampire"—"So Long Letty." *So*

Long Letty was one of Dale's favorite songs.

Rocco De Stefano called up while the police were still on the premises. When told of Jim Colisimo's murder he hurried over immediately. He could offer no information. Woolfson, Colisimo's chauffeur, was questioned. He said he had left Colisimo off on the corner of the cafe and then had returned for Dale Winter. And then Dale called the cafe and was told what had happened.

She let out a small cry and fainted. She came down to the cafe a short time afterward, was questioned then, with great consideration, and repeatedly afterward in the days that followed. She knew nothing.

Jose Moresco, Victoria's brother, was picked up and questioned. He lived at 2006 Indiana Avenue, just a few block from the cafe. He told police he had slept late, that he worked as a clerk in a cigar store on Dearborn, and was in a restaurant having coffee when he heard of Colisimo's murder. He insisted that he and Jim Colisimo had remained friends despite his sister's trouble.

Mrs. Nicholas Nardi, a sister of Victoria, was also questioned. She told police that Victoria and Jim had quarreled often in the past three years and that in January 1920, Victoria had taken her jewelry, about $50,000 worth, and about $5,000 in cash, and left.

Police continued to pick up suspects. Among them was Izzy Buchowsky, who had been busy collecting a fund for the defense of Jimmy Vinci, who was charged with the murder of Mossy Enright, a notorious racketeer. Someone said that Colisimo had thrown Buchowsky out of the cafe when he asked for money for Vinci's defense.

Then several waiters told police that Colisimo and Mike Potzin had quarreled over Dale. Potzin claimed that Colisimo was so nuts about Dale that he was letting the business go to hell. A mysterious witness—there are always at least a half-dozen of these in every murder case—told police a musician who was in love with Dale was seen around the cafe at about the time Colisimo was killed.

Another mysterious witness said that Victoria had been running around with a young hood named Tony Villani. Victoria and Tony Villani couldn't be found. On May 16, Rocco de Stefano received a telegram from Victoria in Los Angeles. The wire read

> *Shock too much for me. See you Friday. Attend to all my affairs. Am giving you power of attorney.*

Victoria reached Chicago on May 21, and went immediately to the office of Rocco de Stefano, who accompanied her to the detective bureau. She was unable to offer any help or to give even the faintest clew to the murder. Some of the reporters pressed her for a statement.

"Well, Jim is dead," she said,

"and I'll say nothing that would further blacken his name. He was good to me until he met Dale Winter, and she never understood him. Jim was Italian and so am I and we understood each other. My money gave him his start, and I intend to be protected in the disposal of his estate."

The coroner's jury used a form in its verdict that it was to use many hundreds of times again through the years which followed:

"Killed by parties unknown to this jury."

IN ORDER TO understand Al Capone, it is necessary to understand Big Jim Colisimo, for Capone was to use all the tactics Colisimo had used. In his climb to the top, Colisimo, as did Capone after him, never gave heed to the fact that the greater success he achieved in the underworld the closer he moved to this death at the hands of those who wanted his position and power.

Colisimo was to know, no doubt, at that moment when death had come, a feeling of blind, sickening terror, the complete defeat, the lonely and abysmal regret that it all had been so without meaning, all the overwhelming measure of ruin to all that he had constructed by planning, scheming, deceit, and murder.

In that last second before the shock of the first slug stormed through his body, he was to wish it could have been otherwise. He was to die when he most wanted to live, when he had achieved success —money, power, recognition in the city, a new wife, one who never had sold shoe laces or flowers in the streets, or worked as a madam in a brothel.

Colisimo's organization of his brothels and his success with them, his organization previously of the Italian voters, and the later assembly of the whores, pimps, and madams into a solid voting bloc, convinced Hinky Dink and Bathhouse John that this big Italian had a lot on the ball and that he could be trusted with more important work.

They entrusted him with collecting monies from bookies as part of the payoff for the privilege of running, and after that he was given other duties, all involving payoffs, and with the job of collecting from those who were a little reluctant to meet their payments. For this he needed some musclemen, and he recruited them from among the young Italians in the first ward.

Violences followed, as they must when men are stubborn or resist an invasion of their property rights, especially if they live outside the law or are engaged in illegal enterprises. It is a part of the lexicon of the underworld that thieves will fight harder to protect stolen money than honest men defending what they've earned by the sweat of their brows.

Colisimo's hand soon were covered with blood but he never lost his newly acquired suaveness, his oily smile, the undeniable charm that

couldn't be washed off by the blood he had spilled. He glad-handed everyone. He was everybody's friend. But he had a heart that was like that of the prowling beast in the night darkened jungle. He killed. Easily.

This, too, was Al Capone's way. He didn't need the lessons he got from Colisimo but they helped. What he did need was Colisimo's political maneuvers and his manner of reaching the politicians. This he learned well.

As Colisimo gathered connections and power in the city he broadened his racket activities to include gambling, extortion, labor unions, and multifarious other enterprises, legitimate, quasi-legitimate, and illegitimate. In an uncommonly shrewd maneuver, Colisimo switched his votes from Democratic to Republican in a tight mayoral election which put William Hale "Big Bill" Thompson into city hall.

Thompson was a lover of the bright lights, had an itchy palm and a long, agile arm. He was made to order for Colisimo, and Big Jim, wearing a bright smile on his full face, moved in as he moved Hinky Dink and Bathhouse John out of the first ward. With the first ward firmly in his grip, Colisimo now turned his attention to the Mafia. There was a Mafia then, and there is a Mafia now, by any other name.

The Mafia had a long history of bloody revolutions in Chicago. No less than fourteen previous rulers had their heads torn off by blasts from sawed-off shotguns. Colisimo made up a list of the men he believed entertained ambitions for the leadership of the Mafia. He eliminated the competition in a relatively short time. As has been said, he killed easily.

Colisimo gave birth to Al Capone. He agreed to employ him as his bodyguard when it was suggested to him by Johnny Torrio, and as his bodyguard Capone was close to all of Colisimo's dealings. He watched, listened, and absorbed.

What he didn't learn from Big Jim he learned from Johnny Torrio. What he didn't have to learn from Colisimo, and surely not from Torrio, was how to kill. At this he was the master. Cruel, cunning, heartless, without qualms or compunctions, Capone would kill mercilessly, in broad daylight or in the dead of night.

With the death of Colisimo, Johnny Torrio moved in. Beside him, ever watchful, was Al Capone. There was no hint in the air that a secret loneliness prevailed in the earth, that it contained a violence which was to grow as swiftly as weeds in an untended field, that this violence would be relentless, repetitious, a wild fury that was a devastating avalanche of killings, human slaughter by the creeping killers who came out of the dunghills of criminal syndicalism.

The first explosion had been readied by a man with a scar on his

face, and he walked with a gun in his hand which he pointed at the heart of a city.

Torrio took over the cafe, took over the brothels, the bookie joints, gambling dens, the shylocking, some of the unions.

"We need a headquarters," he said to Capone. "Some place where we can meet with our men and talk things over."

Al Capone said, "There's a place down the street, about a block south, a store and a lot of rooms upstairs. It could be the spot."

"Get it," Torrio ordered.

Capone got it, and that was the birth of the infamous *Four Deuces* which took its name from the street number on the building—2222 South Wabash.

Al Capone turned the store part into a furniture business, stocked it with a lot of stuff nobody would buy if they were prodded with a gun, which is what Capone and Torrio wanted. The rear part of the store was partitioned off into an office where many of the meetings were to be held. The rooms upstairs were divided into apartments and were used by various members of the Combination, as Torrio named the gang.

One by one and two by two men were added until the gang boasted of a sizable force. Frank Diamond, Louis "Little New York" Campagna, Frank Nitti, Willie Heeney, Bob McCullough, Phil D'Andrea, Charlie Fischetti, a cousin of Al's, and a dozen others. And, too, Jack McGurn, nee Vincent Gebardi, and Sam "Golf Bag" Hunt. Some of the men left over from the Colisimo gang were kept on but didn't last long.

BIG JIM COLISIMO

Al Capone did the recruiting of the hoods into the gang, and picked each man with an eye to the loyalty he would have toward him rather than to Torrio. Even at that early stage he was planning to take over from Torrio.

Capone was a big man physically. A little under six feet, he was as solid as a rock and carried his two-hundred plus pounds like a well-conditioned fullback. He was strong as an ox and moved like a light-

weight. He took the hoodlum out of the thug class in dress. Immediately after Colisimo's murder Capone began to wear tailor-made suits, expensive shoes, spats in the fall and winter, and a white, wide-brimmed hat which became his trade-mark. He also wore a .38 automatic in a shoulder holster and never was without it.

One of the first things Capone did was to reorganize the brothels Colisimo had operated loosely. He took along three men with him and began calling on the madams in the first ward. He made the same spiel to each one.

"You are going to run your place as usual," Capone said. "However, the Combination will supply new girls every two weeks, a sort of interchanging setup, girls from one house to another, see? The Combination will guarantee you protection, furnish the lawyers in case the girls are arrested, pay the fines, get the girls out on bail, the whole works, see? You got nothing to worry about except to run the place. The girls will eat here, and we'll supply the food, and also your towel and linen service, and we'll pay the rent. How does that suit you?"

"How much of the take is this Combination goin' to want?"

"All of it. You get a hundred a week. The girls get fifty per cent less a fee for rent, food, bail service, linen service, lawyers, doctors, and maybe one or two other things."

"Suppose me and the girls don't want this setup?" the madam replied. Then what?"

Capone grinned. "Everybody wants to live, girlie, and you look like you might have quite a few years left."

"You bastards aren't movin' in," the madam exploded. "You're restoring slavery. I'm not going for it so get the hell out of here and take your goons with you"

Al Capone slapped the woman across the face, the blow knocking her to the floor. "Get up, you two-bit whore and bring in your girls or I'll kick your guts out!" He made a menacing gesture with a foot.

The madam got to her feet, rubbed her face and called in the girls. There were ten of them, some pitifully young, in their late teens, still fresh looking although there were the first lines of hardness and coarseness around their eyes and mouths.

Al Capone looked them over and grunted. His eyes stayed on a young blond who stared back at him coolly.

"What's your name, Blondie?" he asked.

"Judy."

Capone grunted. "How old are you?"

"Old enough."

"Don't play it smart with me, Blondie. I asked you a question. How old are you?"

"Seventeen. I'll be eighteen in three months."

"Where you from?"

"Salina, Kansas. I came to Chi-

cago about six months ago. Are you a cop? Is this a pinch?"

Al Capone grunted. "No, I'm not a cop."

"You can bet your little backside he's not a cop. He's taking over. That's why he's here," the madam interposed.

Capone turned to the madam. "You keep that up and you'll find yourself on the floor again." He turned back to the girl. "Go get your clothes or whatever stuff you've got here. You're going back to Kansas, on the next train."

"Say, what the hell are you, anyway, a captain from the Salvation Army or something? I can't go back to Kansas. My old man kicked me out of the house. That's a small town, so small that when a mouse has a litter the burg is overcrowded. What's with you, mister?"

Al Capone thought a moment. "Okay. I'm gonna get you a job in a speakeasy as a waitress. I'll see to it that you make more money than you ever made in this joint, but if I ever see you in one of these places or hear of it I'll break every bone in your body."

"I haven't got any money. How the hell am I gonna live till I get a pay or something?"

"I'll take care of it. Now go get your stuff."

Judy turned from him and went toward the back of the house for her belongings. Whether Capone's treatment of Judy was contrived for the effect it would have on the other girls or whether it was a sincere gesture to get her out of a whorehouse doesn't matter but the other girls were impressed. While Judy was getting her things together Capone explained the setup to the girls.

"I'm guaranteeing you that you'll never have to serve any time in the can if you should be pinched. You'll be out faster than you were taken in. You'll be protected in every other way too. That's part of the deal. Anybody got any objections?"

The girls smiled at him and shook their heads. They liked the setup. Most of them didn't like the madam who charged them for everything anyway and didn't give them the protection Capone offered.

IT TOOK ABOUT two months to organize all the brothels and the money started to roll in. Organization of an illegal, illicit or criminal enterprise is relatively simple, and its growth and expansion may be likened to the stone dropped in a pool of water which causes the formation on the surface of concentric circles, one within the other, and all have a common center.

Each of the outer circles becomes, in the light of its importance, the one nearest the center or secondary, and so on, and these circles represent the lawyers who come into the sphere of criminal activity, the police officers who agree to cooperate, the district attorneys who refuse to issue warrants, the judges who will

dismiss or nol pros charges in agreement with district attorneys, and those fixers and leeches who attach themselves to anything and anyone who will put a dirty buck into their pockets.

Nothing will attract a certain type man more than the lure of the buck for which he doesn't have to work, that he can obtain by the simple expedient of either looking the other way, or not doing something which he should be doing as his duty on his sacred oath.

So organized crime on a Syndicate scale came to the first ward, backed by the men in police authority, by certain of the district attorneys, by politicians. The man selected to handle the payoffs to cops, district attorneys, judges, and politicians was a small, clever, and extremely shrewd young man in his late twenties named Jake Guzik. He was the principal in an incident which saw Capone commit his first murder after the killing of O'Bannion.

Early in 1924, Jake Guzik was punched around in a saloon run by Hy Jacobs at 2300 South Wabash. He came back to the Lexington Hotel, which had been taken over by Torrio and Capone as their official headquarters, and told Capone what had happened.

"This guy Joe Howard punched me around," Guzik told Capone. "He's big and he thinks he's the toughest guy in Chicago. He told me to go back and tell my friends that he had pushed me around and that if they wanted to make something of it he'd be right there."

"Where?" Al Capone asked.

"In Hy Jacobs' bar."

"Al," Torrio said, "don't do anything rash. This can be taken care of in the right way."

"The right way is my way, Johnny. This guy has a big mouth and I'm going to shut it for him."

Torrio rose from his chair and went to where Al Capone stood checking his gun, put his hands on his shoulders. "Al, you start trouble and the boys downtown will get upset."

"The boys downtown are taking a big rakeoff from our business, Johnny. If they get upset they may lose what's most important to them —our money. I'll handle this. You just take it easy." He adjusted the holster and the gun and went out.

Joe Howard was a big guy, and he was tough, an independent hood, but his mistake was that he thought he was tougher than anyone in town. That's where he made his big mistake because the toughness in Capone was his absolute coldness, his disregard for human life and his willingness to kill under any and all circumstances. Joe Howard just didn't know Capone.

When Al Capone came into the bar Joe Howard looked at him disdainfully. There were about a dozen other men at the bar, and these men must have seen something in Ca-

pone's eyes. They moved away from where the two men stood.

Al Capone said, "You got loose hands, guy. You use them too much and you use them on little guys like Jake Guzik. That makes you a yellow punk, see?"

Joe Howard came at last to the Al Capone he didn't know, but he had made his remarks to Jake Guzik in this same place, and before some of these same men, and now had to back up his words or back down and admit he was a yellow punk. He foolishly chose to back up his remarks. He gave it quite a play. He looked Capone up and down and then he laughed, and when he stopped laughing he said, "Stop acting like a bad guy, Capone, and go back to your broads, you dirty pimp."

There wasn't time for Joe Howard to do anything but raise his hands, and that didn't do him any good either. Capone shot him six times in the head and walked out.

There were a dozen witnesses to the killing but when the cops came there wasn't anyone who actually saw it, who knew how it happened or who had done it.

What was known was that a witness to any crime committed by a member of the Combination didn't have a chance, that he would never get to the witness chair to tell his story, that in the first place the cops wouldn't make an arrest. But if they did it would be to arrest the witness and place him in "protective custody" and this protective custody would be a dank jail cell in the 11th and State Street station, where he would be forgotten, or until such time as his memory cleared sufficiently to recall that his first impression of what he had seen and heard had been erroneous. And in the second place, having discovered that his memory had played him tricks and he couldn't positively identify the criminal or killer, and was released, his freedom would be his death warrant. That's the way it was.

The cops knew that Capone had killed Joe Howard, and so did the underworld. They also knew that Capone was responsible for more than a score of killing since the Colisimo murder, that he was the man behind the gun for Johnny Torrio and his name became synonymous with death, violent and cruel, and without mercy.

The organization of the brothels on the South Side brought Johnny Torrio into focus as a man who would bear watching, who was certain to rise to the top in Chicago's rackets.

On the North Side, where Dion O'Bannion and Bugs Moran held sway, Torrio and Capone were referred to as "those pimps." Vice on any scale was still regarded with a great deal of contempt by big-time thieves, racketeers, and gangsters.

It wasn't until its full scope as a source of revenue was revealed that it was treated otherwise. Torrio

knew, however, that he had to start at some point in his plan to take over Chicago, and vice offered the least line of resistance. Also, it put the necessary funds in his hands with which to move into other fields, and Capone knew that too.

Torrio, looking the situation over, knew he couldn't yet combat the organized gangs of O'Bannion, Moran, the West Side O'Donnells, the South Side O'Donnells, the partnership of Terry Druggan and Frankie Lake, or any of the others. These were all in the city itself, in the very heart of Chicago. In the immediate suburbs there were no gangs.

"We'll move into the suburbs," he told Capone. "We'll put in a little beer and liquor, a little gambling, a few other things."

"Like where?" Capone asked. "And without protection?"

"No. I've taken care of that. Jake has seen the people in the suburbs and they've listened to reason."

"Why didn't I know about this before?" Capone asked. "I'm entitled to know any moves you make. Not after but before!"

"Sure, Al, but this was done on the spur of the moment. You'll be the one to set things up in the suburbs. You take all the boys you think you'll need and set it up."

Al Capone wasn't quite placated but decided to let things pass. He would take care of the situation later.

The Combination moved into Berwyn, just west of Chicago and Cicero, south into Stickney and Forest View, and north into Oak Park, and thus drew a straight line down Austin Avenue, which separates Cicero from the suburbs on the west, and runs from 63rd Street on the south to North Avenue on the north. It was a cute trick because Torrio thus invaded both the far South Side and penetrated into the Near North Side.

Now, as he would grow bigger and stronger, he could advance his lines eastward, grab up Cicero on the west and move to the north as far as Skokie or Evanston, and to the south as far as Blue Island in a sort of pincer campaign. His plan would have done credit to a man of greater military intelligence than his but would not have accomplished any better results. However, in order to accomplish all this he needed the one man who could do it—Al Capone, the man with the gun, the man with the muscle, the death dealer.

O'Bannion, Moran, the O'Donnells, and Druggan and Lake were sound asleep, completely unaware of Torrio's plans, his setting up, as it were, of strategic points from which he could move his "troops" and strike at vulnerable sections. Besides, they were too busy with beer and alcohol, making it and delivering it, and counting their enormous profits. And then, about a year after Torrio and Capone took over the suburbs, they were ready to

move into the South Side, fully, with beer and alcohol, gambling, protection.

The bookies were attacked first.

ON THIS DAY, Al Capone selected Frank Nitti, Frank McErlaine, and Jack McGurn to accompany him. The first place selected as a starter was a fairly large handbook on Wabash Avenue. It was operated by two partners named Jack Anthony, an Italian, and Harvey "Hard Hat" Cole, an Irishman, whose nickname came from the fact that he always wore a derby hat. They were strictly gamblers, had always been gamblers. They didn't know anything about muscle or violence. It was a little before noon when Al Capone rapped on the glass door fronting the book joint. The shade was pushed aside and the doorman peeked through the opening.

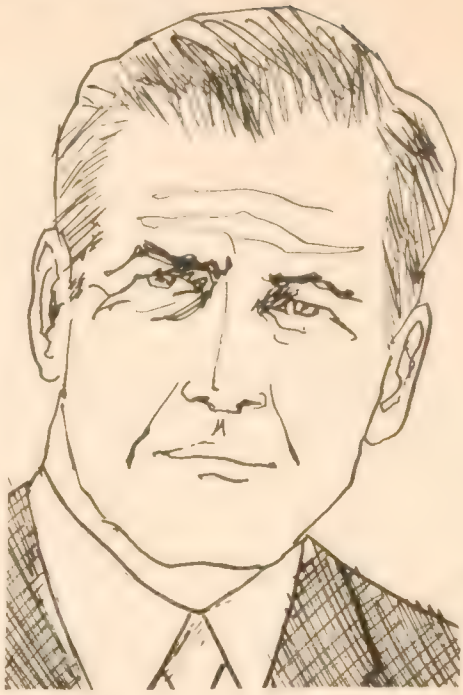
"We ain't open yet," he said. "Twelve-thirty."

Capone said, "we want to talk to Anthony and Cole."

"I'll go tell them," the doorman said. He left and came back a minute later. "Jack said you should come back at twelve-thirty."

"Go back and tell him I said he should open the door," Al Capone ordered. "Now! Understand?"

The doorman looked Capone up and down through the glass door, and then he shifted his gaze to Frank McErlaine, of whom Johnny Torrio said, "There's no more murderous sonofabitch in the world."



DINO O'BANNION

The doorman obviously didn't like what he saw. He left and returned a short time later with Jack Anthony.

"Open up, Jack," Capone ordered. "We want to talk to you."

Anthony's dark, narrow face looked troubled. He hesitated, seeming to be debating with himself the decision to whether to let in the four or tell Al Capone to take his three hoods and go jump in the lake. He asked, "All of you coming in? You and those three other guys?"

"That's right, Jack. All four of us. Now open up the door!"

Anthony turned the key in the door and let the four in. "What's up? What do you want?"

"Let's go into the joint and talk about it," Al Capone said.

The layout of this handbook was more or less like most of the other handbooks in Chicago. It was a converted store. A short corridor had been built from about six feet from the door and ran for some ten feet, turned left into a sort of foyer built from beaver-board and plaster and enclosed an area about six feet wide which led to a solid oak door.

Behind the door was the horse room, a long wooden counter behind which stood six writers, and opposite the counter was a wide blackboard which carried the entries from the various tracks, the prevailing odds, and the conditions of each track, fast, slow, muddy, sloppy, etc. To the right of the room was a cage from which the winning tickets were paid. The cage about fifteen feet long and ten feet wide also served as an office.

Jack Anthony led Al Capone and the three other men into the office. Cole was sitting at a desk writing figures on a sheet. He was a short, stocky Irishman, in his late thirties, pleasant faced, with blue eyes and dark hair. A lighted cigar was stuck in a corner of his mouth and the proverbial derby hat was set at a rakish angle on his head. He looked up as Anthony led in the quartet, a slightly curious expression on his ruddy face.

Al Capone came right to the point. "We're your partners. Fifty-fifty."

Cole looked up, was grim for a brief moment, then let out a raucous laugh. Anthony just stared at Capone.

"What the hell do you mean you're our partners?" Cole asked.

"Just what the hell I said!" Capone replied.

"You sonofabitch!" Cole retorted. "You come in here with your tough hoods and say you're our partners! We worked for ten years, sweated and boiled to build up this place and you think you're going to just walk in and say you're our partners!" Cole's face had turned crimson and his voice was filled with emotion as he spoke. "Like hell! You'll have to kill us first!"

The writers behind the counter started to move toward the office and Nitti, McGurn, and McErlaine drew pistols and pointed them at the men. The writers paused and drew back.

Nitti said, "You guys stay put and you won't get hurt. You got nothing to do with this, so act smart. You wanna get hurt then start playing hero."

Anthony turned his head and spat at Capone's feet. Al Capone slammed his fist into Anthony's face. The punch threw the slight Italian against the wall. Capone reached out his two hands and yanked Anthony toward him, slammed his fist into his face again and again. The blood was pouring out of Anthony's nose and mouth.

"Turn him loose!" Cole yelled.

McErlaine reached over and pulled Cole to him but the stocky Mick was full of fight. He hit McErlaine with a right to the face and then McErlaine reached inside his coat and withdrew a heavy automatic pistol. He slugged Cole with the barrel across the head once, twice, three times, and Cole collapsed. Two of the writers came out from behind the counter and started toward the cage. Nitti and McGurn met them guns in hands.

"Get back or I'll blow your heads off!" Nitti ordered. The two writers stopped dead in their tracks and backed away.

Nitti called to the taller of the two men. "You," he shouted, "you dumb son—, come here!" The man hesitated. Nitti yelled again. "I said come here!"

The man came toward Nitti. When he was at arms' length away, Nitti swung his gun and hit the man across the forehead with the barrel of the gun. Blood spurted from the gash and the man dropped to the floor.

Nitti yelled, "I told you that you had nothing to do with this, didn't I? When I say something I mean it. He drew back his foot and kicked the man in the stomach. He then spat down at him. "Leave this guy lay right there," he said to the other men behind the counter. "Leave him just like he is. I want him to bleed a little."

Al Capone and McErlaine had revived Cole and Anthony by throwing water over them. Capone said, "Get this straight, once and for all. We're in. Either we're in or you're out. If we have to take it all we will. Don't go griping to any cops either because that ain't gonna do you any good either. Things are changing in this town. It's going to be like I say."

This was Al Capone, barely twenty-four years old, a man with no more than a fifth grade education, who had been born in Naples, Italy, a foreigner, now an invader, a man who set out to conquer a city, the second largest city in the United States. His assets were no more than his cunning, ruthlessness, a native intelligence, nerves of steel, cold logic, and a kind of shrewdness which told him the dollar could buy any man. He was almost right.

The taking over of all the bookie joints on the South Side was accomplished after a short time. The pattern was the same in each instance. Those who chose to remain stubborn wound up with broken heads, arms, legs, and some of them with their lifeless forms in rain-soaked ditches or in some dark alley or dirty street.

And so the Combination began to take form. Torrio recognized in Capone a man with undue ability for the things he didn't have the guts to do, the brutal beatings, the depraved disregard for right, the maniacal lust for murder, and that Al Capone also had an ability with

men, how to place them, use them, control them.

Capone said, "We're ready for beer and liquor, Johnny. And those smart Micks on the North Side, O'Bannion and Moran."

"We don't have to start any wars, Al," Torrio replied. "If they will leave us alone we can leave them alone."

"How?" Al Capone asked. "When we move in we'll have started a war. They're in our territory with beer and liquor. You think they'll stand still when we move to take over?" He waved a hand. "Never! We'll have to kill a few of them or all of them."

His words were prophetic but he didn't know it then. Then he was speaking only figuratively. But what he said took form in the most outrageous onslaught against law and order in the history of America's underworld.

Torrio didn't like the idea. It was written all over his face. "Killings will bring heat, and heat will bring the cops. I promised to keep it clean, take over in an orderly way."

Capone snorted. "How the hell you gonna take over from a bunch of guys who've got guns pointed at your guts? Orderly way? There's only one orderly way. Lay them out. Dead!"

O'Bannion and Moran are tough and they've got a lot of good men with them," Torrio pointed out. "I think we should move into Cicero, Burnham, Evanston, and places like that first."

"Good!" Capone said. "We'll put up our brewery and warehouses in Burnham but we've got to take over the South Side completely. And the only way to do it is to run O'Bannion and Moran out of the territory." He punched himself in the chest with a heavy fist. "This is our territory, Johnny. Lock, stock, and barrel. That's the way it has to be."

Torrio conceded. And so the Combination went into the beer and liquor business. The production at Burnham wasn't too high, not high enough, that is, to begin a taking over of the business on the South Side, so the wort, or unfermented malt, was shipped by truck to a fermentation station, bottled and stored, or kegged and stored.

This system of beer production, begun through necessity, became the system by which all beer production was handled, making it at one place, fermenting it at another, distributing it from another. It made detection and raids difficult. The Combination wasn't concerned about raids from the city police or sheriff's office but from the feds.

The Combination moved in with muscle on all the taverns and the speakeasies, nite clubs, restaurants, and all other places that sold beer. They threatened, cajoled, beat up dozens of men, killed a dozen or so before they brought everyone into line on the South Side. And when

they did, they ran headlong into Dion O'Bannion and George "Bugs" Moran. Actually, Torrio's beer was far superior to that made by O'Bannion and Moran.

When Prohibition came in, the high alcoholic content beer was replaced with beer which had little or no alcoholic content at all. This "near-beer" — as it was then called, was made by merely removing the alcohol, or reducing it, as was done when President Roosevelt legalized 3.2% beer on March 22, 1933. The legal breweries were assigned government inspectors to check on the beer production, to see to it that the alcohol was removed before it was kegged .

The inspectors were poorly paid and thus susceptible to bribery and corruption, especially in the face of a weekly payoff which often amounted to ten and twenty times their salary.

Torrio and Capone bought into legal breweries or muscled into them and took over the production of beer. It was good beer, better than that made by Dion O'Bannion and Bugs Moran and Capone sold it on the South Side by the simple expedient of throwing out all the beer a saloon keeper had that had been sold him by O'Bannion or Moran and putting in his.

On the North Side O'Bannion fumed and raved. "Those heathen pimps are stealing our business! They got to go!" He turned to Hymie Weiss, his chief lieutenant, "Hymie, set those heathens up! Get their trucks, drivers, smash their breweries! Put 'em out of business and get our customers back!"

O'Bannion's self-righteous declaration in his reference to Torrio and Capone *stealing* his business was ludicrous. He had been a thief, robber, safe-cracker, burglar, had served time, cheated anyone he could, and still attended church regularly at the Holy Name Cathedral where he had been a choir boy! He was the prize enigma. One thing decent could be said about him: he loved his wife Viola, and was true to her.

Bugs Moran had three things in common with O'Bannion. He was Irish. He had the same criminal background. He hated Torrio and Capone. Neither one, however, could match Torrio's ingenuity or Capone's ability at organization. Furthermore, neither one nor any member in their gangs could match Capone for guts, savagery, sheer brutality, or a willingness to do battle with his fists. On any day, in a fair fist fight, Capone could have taken O'Bannion and Moran at the same time.

O'Bannion had Hymie Weiss, real name Earl Wajciekowski, a hot-headed Pole; Two-Gun Louie Alterie; and Schemer Drucci. Tough boys. Moran had Frank and Pete Gusenberg. Also tough boys. Tough but not tough enough.

What made Al Capone different from these men was an indefinable

something which, paradoxically, stood out like huge pieces of granite. There was something fateful, hard, an uncommon fury, force, power and intensity about him. He imbued the inner circle of the gang with it — Jack McGurn, Frank Nitti, Frank McErlaine, Nick Circella, Willie Heeney, the dope addict dandy, and Albert Anselmi and John Scalisi.

There were dozen of other members in all three gangs of course, the gunmen, the expendables, the front line soldiers who were sent out to kill each other. The inner-circle members reserved themselves for executions of the top rivals. The sides were drawn and the war began. And it was war.

CHICAGO WAS SHAKEN to its roots at first as the killings began, in broad daylight, at twilight, in the evening, and in the dead of night. There was a killing or more a day during the bloody seventy days of war between the gangs, and then peace, a temporary peace, was made, boundary lines established and agreements made for each gang to stay strictly within its own boundaries.

Torrio asked Capone, "Do you think O'Bannion and Moran will keep their word, stay in their own territory?"

Al Capone snorted. "Johnny, one look at those guys' faces and you can tell they never kept their word in their lives. One or the other or both will do something sooner or later. I learned one thing a long time ago, Johnny. That is not to trust any man who lives outside the law, or inside the law for that matter. Come to think of it, the only honest face I ever saw was on a dog!"

Torrio nodded, but mentally excluded himself. Such was the little man's ego that he believed everything he did in the name of personal advancement or self-aggrandizement was honest and right, even cold-blooded murder.

"I was thinking," Torrio said, "that now is the time to move in on Cicero. The election for mayor will be April first. We've got three months to select our man and put him in. Then we take over. Look into the situation and let me know what you think."

Al Capone selected as his man the incumbent Democratic mayor, Joseph Z. Klenha.

Cicero, a suburb of Chicago on the West Side, was a wide open town peopled mostly by Slavs, Bohunks, and other immigrants from the Balkans. The man behind the throne in Cicero was Eddie Tancl, who ran a saloon, spoke the language of the people, and controlled their votes much as Big Jim Colisimo had controlled the Italian votes in the First Ward. Capone reported back to Torrio.

"We'll take Tancl out of the picture, put Klenha back in office, buy the cops and set up business."

Torrio smiled dourly. "Just like that, Al? That simple?"

"Not entirely. There may be a little blood and a few heads busted but it'll be done."

"Okay. Go ahead."

Al Capone stuck a big cigar in his mouth, bit off the end, spat it out, lighted it, blew out a long stream of brown smoke and said cryptically "I intend to."

April 1, 1924, was a day the residents of Cicero never forgot. Al Capone moved in with two scores of hoods and set out to capture the election. Ballot boxes were smashed, a cop by the name of Anton Bican was beaten with blackjacks, about fifty citizens were slugged, a man named Joe Rice had his throat slashed. Two other men, Roman Delcewicz and John Gairus, were shot. An unknown man was shot and killed in Eddie Tancl's saloon. Clerks and judges of election were snatched and driven to Chicago, where they were held prisoners in a garage.

A riot call was turned in late in the day and about a hundred cops from Chicago were sworn in as county deputies by County Judge Edmund K. Jarecki and rushed to Cicero.

A squad of cops headed by Detective Sergeant William Cusick confronted Capone, his brother Frank, and Charlie Fischetti, who were standing on the corner of Twenty-second Street and Cicero Avenue in front of a polling place. Frank Capone pulled his gun and pointed it at one of the cops and pulled the trigger. The gun clicked but didn't fire. Frank Capone swore.

"You lousy cop bastard," he cried. "I'll kill you!" He backed away, squeezed the trigger again and again. Patrolmen Grogan and McGlynn fired back.

Death came swiftly for Frank Capone. As he fell, Charlie Fischetti ran, firing wildly as he did so, cursing the cops for having killed his cousin. He ran and screamed curses, and fired his gun, and the cops continued to chase him. They finally captured him and subdued him.

Al Capone saw his brother fall and knew he was dead. He, too, cursed the cops, trained his gun on any cop he saw and fired. He ran south of Cicero Avenue for a block

and then was blocked by a squad commanded by Police Sergeant William Riley. Capone yanked another gun out of his belt and stood there in the street firing with two guns, and when his guns were empty he escaped in the darkness of the street.

The Democratic ticket was swept into office, headed by Mayor Klenha and backed by Capone. A short time later two men walked into Eddie Tancl's saloon and shot him dead. Torrio and Capone moved into Cicero, took over the Hawthorne Hotel as their headquarters, set up gambling joints in a place called The Ship, where bejeweled women and men in evening clothes from Chicago's Gold Coast began leaving some $3,000,000 a year in profits. There were lesser joints for the blue collar trade. There were bookie joints, whore houses, slot machines, a score or more of new taverns and saloons. The town was turned into a noisy, brassy, garishly lighted modern Sodom and Gomorrah. And all this by a scar-faced bum from Brooklyn with a gun in each hand.

Mayor Klenha had the temerity to complain to Al Capone one day that maybe things were too hot, that maybe they should close up a few places, police others a little better.

The two men were standing on the top step of the Cicero City Hall in broad daylight, in the sight of hundreds of passers-by.

"You dumb Hunky," Al Capone swore. "I put you back in office over the blood of my brother. I shot it out with dozens of cops and almost got myself killed too to make you a big shot. I've made you rich, stupid, and you got the guts to tell me to close up some of the joints?"

Al Capone spat in Klenha's face, then knocked him down with a single blow to the jaw, picked him up and dragged him into the building.

Back in Chicago, O'Bannion and Moran were worried as they saw the handwriting on the wall. Torrio and Capone had become big, bigger in three years than O'Bannion and Moran had become in ten. They decided to move in, to take Torrio and Capone out of the picture and split the town two ways. It was the biggest mistake of their lives.

As they held up Torrio-Capone trucks, raided their breweries, and liquor drops, smashed their bookie joints, killed a score of the Combination's hoods reprisals followed. And once again Chicago became a violent city with death the constant shadow over its streets. Capone then ordered O'Bannion's execution.

It was carried out by Anselmi, Scalisi, and McGurn in the now infamous "*Handshake Murder.*" Scalisi and Anselmi walked into the flower shop on North State Street across from the Holy Name Cathedral, a shop run by O'Bannion as a front but which netted him huge

profits, and Scalisi stuck out his hand in greeting.

O'Bannion didn't know either of the two men, since they had only recently joined the Torrio-Capone gang. He thought they had come in to buy flowers or a wreath as an offering for Mike Merlo, who had died several days before. Scalisi held O'Bannion's hand in a vise-like grip, and as he did so, McGurn came in. McGurn and Anselmi shot O'Bannion seven times and O'Bannion fell among his flowers and stained them with his blood.

The killing intensified the war between the Torrio-Capone faction and the now Weiss-Moran faction. Killings went on day and night. The citizens of Chicago, grown accustomed to the wild doings of the gangs, shrugged their shoulders. So long as they killed only each other then let them do it. Maybe in time, if the killings kept up, there would be no more gangsters, hoods, or killers left.

Torrio wanted peace, however. He had become soft, a lover of the good life. He attended the opera with his wife, dined at the best restaurants, always with bodyguards, however. He wanted to feel safe, to move about the city securely. But it wasn't to be, and he knew it, because Weiss and Moran sought him constantly.

"What the hell do you want peace for?" Capone said to him. "You should know that Weiss won't agree to peace unless we give him McGurn, Scalisi, and Anselmi. And even then he won't agree to peace. Neither will Moran. And I won't give that crazy Polack a sick mongrel dog, let alone three of our best men. To hell with him and Moran. We're going to take both of them out of the picture and then we'll have peace. No other way!"

"I don't like it, Al. Bad business. Very bad." They were in Al Capone's suite in the Lexington Hotel. Torrio got up from his chair and walked around the room, his hands clasped behind him, his head down. "I'm with my wife when we go out and I'm afraid they'll kill her too. That's what bothers me."

Capone chewed on a cigar. What Torrio said was true but what he didn't say was what Capone believed also was true. That he had lost all his guts, that was evident. Fear was written on his pale features, the ascetic countenance of a monk at prayer that belied the man inside.

"I'll put more men with you if that will make you feel any better. Some good boys."

Torrio looked up, a sad expression on his face.

"It would help," he said softly. "It would help a lot."

"In the meantime I'm going after Weiss. That'll help too."

The search for Hymie Weiss and a manner in which to execute him went on day after day, relentlessly. But Weiss was smart and couldn't be trapped.

On January 24, 1925, a short

time after Torrio's talk with Al, he and his wife drove up in front of their apartment building at 7011 Clyde Avenue and stopped. It was about 4:30 in the afternoon and the day was already hazy with the oncoming darkness of night. Mrs. Torrio got out of the car and walked up the steps of the building while Johnny Torrio lingered to pick up some parcels from the back of the car. He gathered up the packages and started for the entrance of the apartment house when two men rushed from across the street, took a position a short distance from Torrio and opened fire with a pistol and a sawed-off shotgun.

The volley of gunfire shattered the windshield of the car. Torrio dropped the packages and ran for the safety of the building. The hood with the pistol chased him and emptied his gun at him, then both hoods ran back across the street, leaped into a car manned by a driver and raced away.

Torrio was rushed to the Jackson Park Hospital with five gunshot wounds. His jaw had been shattered. He had two wounds in the chest and one in the abdomen and one in the right arm. The bullets that struck him had been rubbed with garlic to create a deadly toxic condition. Torrio's life hung on by the slimmest of threads for ten days as doctors fought to save him, and then he rallied, much to the astonishment of his doctors.

Police officers brought suspects to Torrio's bedside for a make on the men who had attacked him. Among them were Moran and Weiss. Torrio refused to make any identification.

"No use bringing anyone else in here," he said. "I won't rap any of them. I wouldn't lay a finger even on the guilty men. I know the men who shot me."

Detectives questioned everyone in the neighborhood. They came upon Peter Vesert, a sixteen-year-old boy, the son of a janitor. He was too young to understand the dangers of putting the finger on a hood for an attempted murder rap. Police believed that the shooting was a reprisal for O'Bannion's murder and showed young Vesert a picture of Dion's pallbearers carrying the casket from Sbarbaro's funeral parlor to the hearse. Peter Vesert positively identified Bugs Moran, Hymie Weiss, and Frank Gusenberg as the third man.

"I was sure all along," said Captain William Shoemaker, "that the men who shot Torrio were not Italians. If *they* had tried to kill him they would have made certain of him, sure they had done a good job by stepping over his body and firing the coup de grace. Those guys don't leave anything unfinished."

The attempt on his life brought out all the fear in Torrio. All during the time he was in the hospital there was a squad of police detailed to guard him. Al Capone also posted about a dozen men

around the hospital. Torrio refused to eat his food until it was tasted by a nurse, and he insisted that each cop detailed to guard him was screened before being placed on the detail.

There was a case for violation of prohibition laws against him, and Torrio decided to plead guilty to the charges. He appeared in court swathed in bandages, copped a plea and was given a ninety-day term in the jail at Waukegan. While he was in jail, Torrio called in his lawyers, business advisors, and Al Capone. There were daily meetings and conferences which lasted for long hours. When they were finally over, Torrio didn't own a piece of property or a dollar's worth of business in the City of Chicago.

Torrio relinquished every interest he had in the **Combination** to Al Capone.

Two days before he was to be freed, Torrio made arrangements with Al Capone to have an escort of a dozen hoods take him out of the city. He was released a little after midnight, hastened out a rear entrance, driven to Indiana in an escort of half a dozen cars, and put on a train for New York. He went to Italy shortly afterward and stayed there for three years. He never returned to Chicago.

As the train pulled out of the station, Capone stared after the last car as it disappeared into the darkness, looked toward Chicago, and said to himself, "It has to come. I am the king. I am the boss of everything. Everything belongs to me!"

He heard McGurn's voice:

"Al, let's go. We got things to do."

"Yeah," Capone answered, as he got into the car. "Lots of things. The first thing is Mr. Hymie Weiss. Let's go."

Next Month:

THE FALL OF AL CAPONE

Concluding Installment of a Vicious Life

by DAVID MAZROFF

Impossibly unreal, like the fearsome climax of a nightmare, that was Scarface Al Capone's bloody stranglehold on Chicago in the roaring twenties. Here for the first time, you see horror laid bare, and gangdom's ultimate blood bath shown in all its brutal terror. Truly in the rise and fall of Al Capone, all America lived through its ugliest hour. Here is the real story.

a MR. WONG and INSPECTOR BANNERJEE story by DAN ROSS

THE LITTLE BOMBAY COWBOY

He was wealthy, young—and quite dead. Who had killed him? Only Mei Wong—and a little boy—dared guess . . .

MEI WONG stood beside his young friend Henry Phillips and surveyed the scene.

The dead men lay sprawled face downward on the grass. He was fat and gray-haired. The lawn on which he lay was broad and neatly kept, evidently the product of his leisure hours. The grounds surrounding the big stone mansion on Faulkland

Road was surrounded by high iron gates. The place was secluded and lovely, hemmed in with palms and purple bougainvillea.

Vincent Bern, the wealthy art collector who lay murdered amid all this quiet beauty, had been a long time customer of Mei Wong's Bombay art and curiosity shop. The pale, blond young man at his side was the son of another customer and it was he who had summoned the elderly Chinese art dealer to the scene.

Mei Wong studied the large shears buried between Vincent Bern's shoulder blades.

He touched the arm of the young man beside him.

"We had better go inside," he said.

He led the way up the steps a broad, squat figure in an immaculate white linen suit and a floppy Panama hat. When they entered the hallway was filled with people.

A girl sat forlornly alone in the living room, her pert oval face white and tense with shock.

The young man said, "Heather!" and rushed over to her.

Inspector Bannerjee, tall, suave and black bearded, saw Mei Wong in the hallway and came to him. The head of the Bombay homicide division said, "Your young friend is in a lot of trouble." He glanced at the girl and boy talking earnestly together in the living room. "They are both in trouble."

Mei Wong motioned the young man to join them and he returned to the hallway. The old Chinaman told him, "This is my friend, Inspector Bannerjee. He would like to ask you a few questions."

Inspector Bannerjee sighed as if it all had a most unpleasant aspect for him. He spoke in a weary voice. "You are Henry Phillips. Employed with the United States Universal Importers. You have been seeing Miss Bern regularly?"

The young man nodded. "Yes. We plan to get married."

The inspector showed no interest in this. "You knew the dead man?"

"Yes. Heather—Miss Bern, his stepdaughter—brought me here a

few weeks ago. We only met that once."

The inspector's tone became more crisp. "Have you any idea what happened here this afternoon?"

"No. Mr. Wong was the first to get in touch with me. He told me something was wrong and that Miss Bern was in trouble. I hadn't any idea what it was."

"I quite understand," the tall man said dryly. "When were you here last?"

Henry Phillips looked down. "I left her at the front gate about an hour ago. We'd been for a drive. I didn't come in because Vincent Bern and I weren't on speaking terms."

"And then you went?"

"Back to my office." He gave Mei Wong an appealing glance. "That's where he reached me."

"That is correct," the old art dealer said quietly.

"Was there anyone else in the office with you?"

"No. I happen to be the only one there today."

The inspector and Mei Wong exchanged a meaning glance.

Then the old art dealer asked a question. He said, "Did Miss Bern and you ever discuss her stepfather's attitude toward your proposed marriage?"

The young man looked uncomfortable. "Yes."

Inspector Bannerjee spoke again in his bored voice. "With Bern dead

she will come into several millions. That will make a nice dowry."

Henry Phillips spoke hotly. "I don't care for your thinking!"

A turbanned officer stepped up to Inspector Bannerjee and whispered some words in his ear. The tall man nodded. He turned to Mei Wong. "No prints on the shears ex-

cept those of Miss Bern. And they're badly smudged."

Mei Wong nodded solemnly. "How do you reconstruct the crime?"

"It could have been easy," the tall inspector said. "Those shears were sharp and deep in the body. I would say Bern put up no struggle, just let someone plunge them in him. There was no trampled grass. He must have fallen as we found him. I'd say the murderer was someone he trusted, someone he didn't suspect."

"Your suggestion is logical," Mei Wong agreed blandly. "Will you wish to hold this young man for further questioning?"

Inspector Bannerjee said, "No. But I don't want him to leave Bombay."

Henry Phillips and Mei Wong went into the living room, where Heather Bern still sat.

The young man touched her shoulder gently.

"It will be all right," he said.

She looked up at them, "Do they think I did it?"

Mei Wong shrugged. "At the moment they may think anything. What is most important is how much they can prove. Tell me just what did happen?"

The girl sighed. "After Henry left me I walked in the driveway. The little boy from the American vice-consulate's house up the street drove out past on his bicycle. He seemed in a hurry. I noticed him particularly because he had on a new cowboy suit. He's the only one I saw until—" She began to sob and young Phillips sat down and put an arm around her.

Mei Wong said, "You are certain you saw no one else?"

She shook her head.

"And then you found the body?"

Heather Bern shuddered. "I couldn't believe my eyes."

Mei Wong watched her closely. "And then what?"

"I knew I might faint. But I fought it off and made my way into the house and called the police."

A familiar bored voice came from behind Mei Wong. "I don't believe I gave permission for this intimate conversation." The voice belonged to Inspector Bannerjee.

The old art dealer turned to the inspector. "I am hoping to be of some assistance."

"I doubt if that is possible," the inspector told him. And to the girl he said, "Have you anything to add to your story, Miss Bern?"

"Nothing." she said.

The inspector held out a wrapped object. Then, folding the cloth back, he showed them the shears, still stained with Vincent Bern's blood. He said, "An excellent murder weapon. And light enough for you to use, Miss Bern. My guess is you did this alone or with an accomplice." He glanced at Henry Phillips.

The young man jumped up. "I won't listen to any more of this."

Mei Wong restrained him with a pudgy hand. "Please hear the inspector out."

Inspector Bannerjee wrapped up the shears again. "Nothing more to add. I see no motive for the killing other than her quarrel with her father about marrying this young man. There was no theft attempt. Nothing touched in the house. I think she did it, lost her nerve, and called us. Unless you can add other details, Mei Wong."

The old Chinaman sighed. "Perhaps at a later time."

Heather Bern was arrested on suspicion of murder. Henry Phillips was allowed to go free but Mei Wong knew he was also under suspicion. That night the old art dealer sat at his desk in his treasure filled studio high in the Empire Hotel, his expression was inscrutable but his mind working at a highly active pace.

At length a smile crossed his face and he nodded to himself.

The next morning he called on Inspector Bannerjee at Bombay's big police headquarters. He said, "I have the additional details now, Inspector."

The bearded man stared at him quizzically across the desk. "What are they?"

Mei Wong sank heavily in a chair. "You say that, because there was no struggle, Vincent Bern must have been killed by someone he both knew and trusted. I think there is another answer. He was killed by someone he hated but who was only afraid of him."

Inspector Bannerjee's white teeth were revealed as he smiled. "Some-

one he hated and who was afraid of him. Go on."

Mei Wong nodded. "I will produce a witness." He went to the door and opening it, said, "Come along, young man."

A nervous boy of about ten dressed in a flashy cowboy suit entered hesitantly.

"You're wasting time," Inspector Bannerjee demurred. "I questioned this boy and his father yesterday. He's the son of the American vice-consul. He can't help. He saw no one. He's already told us that."

"But he hasn't told you everything," Mei Wong smiled knowingly. "As you say, this is the boy Miss Bern saw riding away on his bicycle yesterday. He is going through a certain cowboy stage and is handy with a lariat."

Inspector Bannerjee's eyebrows raised. "What has that to do with the murder?"

"I realized something last night," Mei Wong said. "This morning I talked to Billy. He's told me something interesting. Bern warned him not to ride his bicycle on the grounds. Billy had other ideas. He drove in and wandered on the lawn, trying his new lariat. He saw the shears on the ground and picked them up. Looping the rope through the handles he began swinging the shears in a circle over his head."

Mei Wong's eye narrowed. "Just as Billy whirled the shears at full tilt Bern came up. He saw the angry face of the man and became panic stricken. He loosened his hold on the rope and one end of it went free. The shears shot along its length through the air like a flying dagger, headed for Bern. The old man instinctively turned away to shield himself and the shears buried in his back."

"But how does this bear on the murder?" the Inspector insisted.

Inspector Bannerjee was on his feet." And you picked up the lariat and drove away. Is that true, boy?"

The youngster nodded and in a small voice said, "Yes."

Mei Wong smiled. "Under the circumstances, Inspector, it would seem most desirable to set Miss Bern free at the earliest moment."

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